This is Chapter 130-139 of the English Translation of the Japanese Web Novel *Arifureta Shokugyou de Sekai Saikyou.*

The original Author is Chuuni Suki who posted the raws here.

The translation and editing were performed by Elementalcobalt whose wordpress is here. These chapters also include translation assistance from Southbound and Tingle.

For recommendations on other "another world" web novels, please visit elementalcobalt's blog here!

Please Support the Official LN Release at J-Novel Club.

Thanks and enjoy!

Chapter 130 – Black Devil

The "Saint Shield" barrier finally dissipated as the outside blaze consumed the remainder of the tar and extinguished. The only remaining vegetation adhered to a strangely metallic ground covered with ash. It looked like an apocalyptic landscape.

"…Hmm?"

"How's everyone?"

"Oh?"

Hajime sat in the middle of the burnt-out wasteland with Yue, Shia, and Kaori holding him tightly with their eyes closed. They each opened their eyes in turn and tilted their heads.

"Oh? What's the matter?"

Hajime asked with a worried voice as he noticed a strange look on Yue. Yue and the other girls looked at each other, acknowledging that they all had recovered before nodding and turning to Hajime.

"…Nn, we endured."

"Yes, the pleasure seems to be gone."

"I also don't feel anything, I'm back to my senses."

It seems to be that way.

They seemed to have endured the aphrodisiac effect of the milky slime that took their sanity with their mental strength. Excessive pleasure wasn't all that different from pain. Hajime couldn't imagine how much Yue and the others had suffered from an attack unlike any other they've ever experienced.

Hajime praised the three of them for doing a good job passing the labyrinth's ordeal.

"As expected, all three of you did a good job. I was worried for a bit but I'm glad you're okay."

"Nn… Kufufu."

"Ehehehe, it's embarrassing to be told that so forwardly."

“It’s thanks to Hajime-kun. It was your support that allowed me to endure.”

Hajime no longer had to hug the three as they were no longer under the effect of the aphrodisiac. Nevertheless, they didn’t let go as they grew gitty over being praised by Hajime.

Hajime tried to loosen his grip assuming it’d be alright by now, but Yue responded by hugging him even stronger.

Did they need more praising? The three girl looked upward at Hajime with blushing cheeks while they clang to him even more aggressively. They didn’t wear expressions that suggested they had lost their sanity. However, those expressions hold a certain allure of their own.

When they were under the aphrodisiac effect, it was easy for Hajime to reject their approaches, but it was a bit more difficult to resist Yue’s charm when she meant it. He gave up trying to get his arms back.

Then…

“Gohon! Sorry to interrupt you, but since we’re all better now I was wondering if you might untie Kouki and the rest?”

“Oh yeah? You did well too. You managed to make it without help. Indeed, a swordsman? Is this one of those spirit unification techniques?”

“Oh, Shizuku. Ehehe, I’m sorry, At the same time… my Shizuku-chan!”

After everything was over, it looked like Shizuku had managed to escape the pleasurable hell at the same time as Yue and the others, but had a haggard expression when she saw the pink space the group had made beside her. The interruption had managed to disrupt the mood and turn the group back to normal.

The girls who had been basking in Hajime’s praise turned away, slightly embarrassed.

“Oh, thank you. Well, I was able to keep calm since my father hammered self-control into me since a young age during fencing. But it was a little dangerous. I mean, I wonder if things would have turned out this way if Kouki and the rest weren’t constrained. I survived because I had the room to concentrate, without having to worry about defending myself. Thank you, Nagumo-kun. ”

“That’s good to hear. The pleasure could have knocked you unconscious. Enduring pleasure in place of pain could do that. While I prepare, Yaegashi, you might want to fix your clothes and mud situation.”

“Clothes? Mud? Oh… yeah. I understand.”

At first, Shizuku did not understand what Hajime had meant, but when she glanced down at herself she noticed that a change of clothes was in order. (It was sweat, Shizuku was just covered in sweat!) She blushed at the comment, nodding tightly.

Hajime used his transmutation to create several simple dressing rooms built from a wall of soil. The “Treasure room” had changes of clothing for Kouki and Ryuutaro as well (clothes bought in town). He took them out and tossed one over to Shizuku. Hajime collected the Bora Cursed Objects from Kouki’s group, releasing them.

Kouki's group immediately drop. Shizuku managed to catch Suzu before she hit the ground, but Kouki and Ryuutaro collapsed to the ground with a rather painful noise. It was the hero and his sidekick, so Hajime had no worries.

While the female teammates used water magic to clean up and changed their clothing, Hajime concentrated on collecting all the spider golems.

They had finished destroying the ground around the immediate vicinity. There would be no Milky Slime coming out of the ground in surprise this time. These extra measures seemed necessary after the amount of time the milky slimes has previously wasted.

"You… master. I wouldn't mind if you looked at this mistress. There is no need for a locker room." At that point, a voice timidly came from behind.

Tio had managed to break through the aphrodisiac effect readily even though she had received the most slime.

Hajime recalls the fact and glances back at Tio.

"Were you still there, Ms. Clarce?"

"!? Please, Master! Are you still doing that? It was certainly pleasant, to begin with, but can you go back to the usual way of naming me!"

"That, what are you even talking about? As usual, Ms. Clarce is Ms. Clarce. Please don't get any closer to me."

"!!!!? Please, Master. I'm getting too excited. I'm repenting, please turn back!"

"……"

As Tio crawls up to his feet and scratches at his shoe, Hajime looks away and ignores her. The distant attitude by calling her with her last name and treating her like she was invisible was unbearable for Tio. Hajime was happy about this, Tio seemed genuinely saddened by this treatment, it looked like he found an effective punishment whenever she acted up.

Tio was trembling as she watched Hajime. By any chance, did Hajime go too far? Her look was becoming more and more tearful.

"This is a terrible master. I ask… call me Tio."

Hajime had dealt a blow to stunt Tio's abnormal behavior at last; it was a very satisfactory feeling.

However, Tio's rueful appearance wasn't the transformation Hajime was hoping for, destroying her beautiful appearance in her deteriorating kimono. Hajime's devious heart considered things a little more, whether he punished her objectively, it seemed to be the role of a master. Happy or not, she wasn't aware of it.

"It's pointless, Tio. It's already too late for you to change the kind of person you are, so at least be a little prudent."

While Hajime shrugged while saying so, Tio was dumbfounded. Her expression brightened, and she gave a smile that looked like it belonged to a sweet, young girl. That smile was beautiful enough to tug on even Hajime's heartstrings.

She was knowledgeable and could have some deep thoughts, understanding the subtleties of the human mind. Understanding someone and making an effort when she could have lost her composure. She had courage and decisiveness, unmatched combat strength. She was affectionate and kept her word. And her appearance was the best. If it wasn't for her abnormality, you could say she was a "perfect woman".

"Really, it is a shame… Because in a sense, I…"

"?"

It seemed like Hajime had opened a new door for Tio. He felt partially responsible for her abnormality but he was helpless to fight it.

"What's is it? Master…"

"…No, nothing. Go get changed and freshen up."

"Yikes, it's a… That's okay then, master? For me to change right here in the corner?"

When Hajime planned for Tio to use the makeshift changing room, Tio gave an expectant look and said such a thing.

Hajime's cheek twitched as he wondered "where's that prudence?" and pulled out a grenade.

"…How about this? It's a special present for you. It'll blow the dirt away along with your skin!"

"!? I get it. I'll go change my clothes immediately!"

Tio waved her hands and dived into the dressing room. While watching Tio's back, a Ryujin that had fallen pitifully beyond repair, for some reason the word 'responsibility' flashed through Hajime's mind. He shook his head to drive the character out of his mind.

Others began to emerge from the dressing room after cleaning themselves. Sure enough, Kouki, Suzu, and most of all Ryuutaro emerged with downtrodden looks. They were all hunched as if burdened by unbearably heavy stones, and the atmosphere was wrapped with dark clouds as if magic was being used.

Although they had lost their sanity during the aphrodisiac effect, they seemed to remember what they'd done. Pleasure followed by hell, it seemed that Tio was right when she predicted this would try the bonds of relationships, Kouki's group seemed proof of that.

Ryuutaru and Kouki couldn't meet the girl's eyes and Suzu seemed determined to keep her distance. Suzu kept to the shadows with their heads down and red ears. Hajime feared he'd need to follow up with Suzu if they couldn't figure things out on their own.

Because they nearly sexually assaulted each other, it made them uncomfortable and provided a sense of guilt that couldn't be ignored. In particular, Suzu was a girl. The fact that she could have started that kind of relationship with her peer caused a certain kind of damage to her spirit.

“Let’s just forget it, Suzu…? It was unavoidable. Things didn’t go too far… so… There are one or two memories no one wants to remember, probably…”

“…. Shizu, Shizu.”

“Look! Remember that time I was wondering around the dirty game section without noticing what was for sale? It was serious, the male customers around were all looking at me with judgmental eyes… and I became depressed…”

“Is…. Shizu interested in dirty games?”

“That’s not it! That was an unfortunate accident!”

“Shizu investigating dirty games… kufufu, with a serious look… pukuku.”

“It is terrible to laugh, Suzu.”

Shizuku looked somewhat relieved now that Suzu was laughing.

It seemed like any comfort would work to overcome the dark history sealed in people’s memories, and “sympathy of embarrassment” was a self-torture ingredient necessary to help Suzu’s spirit recover a bit.

As expected of Shizuku, willing to sacrifice herself. It was admirable!

Kouki had his head down, so Suzu watched him.

“Nagumo cared for everyone. We should be thankful he stopped us.”

“Yes, you’re right. We were saved by Nagumo. I’m serious. Thank you very much.” Ryuutaro who seemed to be uncomfortable following Kouki turned his eyes to Hajime and expressed his thanks.

“Be thankful. Make sure to remember that. Always be conscious of your debt. So that when you’re better, you can return it to me by resolving to be an appropriate meat shield. If I make a mistake, it’ll be fine. Because I’ll go to the ends of the Earth to make sure you repay it.”

Hajime came off more like a Yakuza business lending out money at 11 to 1. When someone skipped a payment, they really did go to any length to make them pay. A thank you didn’t seem to be the kind of payment he was looking for.

The church or someone like Nointo might want Kouki’s party to become his enemy (no matter how hopeless). So he wanted to keep them conscious of the debt, just in case.

But not really knowing what was on Hajime’s mind, Kouki’s group had twitching cheeks and disturbed expressions like cheat victims who had just found themselves consumed by an unreasonable debt.

It certainly made a big debt in that sense unless they could stop relying on Hajime. They recognized that and gave each other a silent nod.

However, the awkwardness seemed to clear up after the speech that trampled the common sense of Hajime.

The thought of the debt collector coming to make unreasonable demands seemed to inspire Kouki and Ryuutaro, and apparently Suzu and Shizuku as well. In a sense, they felt unity over not wanting to be consumed by debt, burying the break between them a bit.

Without being attacked by any more milky slimes, they advanced across the wasteland with ease and finally arrived at the giant tree. They gathered at the entrance and stepped into the next magic circle.

_____

The place where Hajime and company appeared was as expected. However, the light being emitted from it was different from usual. There was a doorway leading to the outside and it was open from the beginning.

Hajime glanced around, seeing that he wasn't missing a single member. The magic eye could not detect the present of any fakes. In other words, they needed to proceed as is.

Hajime cautiously moved forward towards the exit bathed in light as Hajime gave everyone else a nod.

"This is… like Fair Bergen." Hajime looks ahead and nods as so.

Yue and the others had similar impressions and nodded.

Ahead of the cave exit was an aisle, or rather a huge branch that could easily be mistaken for an aisle. When Hajime glanced back, he could see a huge wooden trunk that went back so far he couldn't see the end. In other words, the empty cave came at the root of a branch that Hajime and the others were on.

The tree was too big, and the branch made a 5 meter across the aisle just as it is. Other big branches protrude from the tree intertwining here and there. It was an air corridor in the same way as Fair Bergen.

Unlike Fair Bergen, it was a single branch growing from the tree and intertwine to make the airspace, as opposed to several groupings of branches.

If you look up, there is a stone ceiling, so they were definitely still underground. This tree branch was likely part of the Great Tree as Hajime couldn't imagine there being any other giant trees like this.

"…Great Tree?"

"It's likely this is a space just under the Great Tree."

"But the Great Tree is visible on the ground."

"Well, it seems to have grown branches below the ground. The real roots might be much deeper underground. We only see the tip that's visible, it might be just a small part."

"How big does the Great Tree get?"

Overtaken by the mind-boggling enormity of the Great Tree, it was almost too great to contemplate. The ceiling obstructed the view ahead, but Hajime still imagined the tree towering above them.

Shia's rabbit ears twitched and began to move. Shia appeared to pick up some kind of sound. Shia wondered "What's that sound?" and set out to verify the identity while walking the distance of the branch.

The faint sound was leathery and her ears flopped around with disgust. Shia frowned as her Usamimi picked up the sound, an imperceptible sound that sent goosebumps across her skin. She peered over the edge cautiously.

"? Dark and invisible, that's it."

'What's the matter?"

"I'm hearing a somewhat unpleasant sound, but it's too dark for my eyes…"

"You want me to look for you?"

"Yes, thank you. What is that? The sound of such a feeling, like wriggling."

"I understand, something that sounds disgusting?"

Hajime glanced over the edge on the left of the branch passage after Shia called. Certainly, the darkness could not be pierced at this particular height, but with "night eyes" and "far vision" it wouldn't be a problem for Hajime.

"…!?"

First, Hajime couldn't see anything, but as he narrowed his eyes doubtfully he gave out a cry that couldn't be voiced. He looked up, his face blue and his expression giving away the danger.

"Ha, Hajime!? What's wrong? To see you react so much. What exactly did you see?"

"…Hajime, okay?"

Hajime was the height of fearless arrogance and boldness. For Hajime's face to display fear gave something very difficult to imagine. Yue anxiously rubbed Hajime's back. Shia was holding his hand gently.

Hajime finally recovered as a bit of warmth and murmured while trembling and overlooking everyone with a serious look.

."…The devil is there…"

"Demon?" x5

Everyone inclined their necks at Hajime's pointless words. Kouki and Ryuutaro turned their eyes from Hajime, who to them looked most like the devil himself, to declare something else a devil, gave them watery eyes.

"Yes, it's a devil. It's black and you know it well…"

When he said only that, Hajime pulled out a crossbit and sent it down. A small crystal was put up so that everyone could see.

The things which reflected in the light right in front of Yue and others was…

“!?” x5

If you find one, there is at least thirty more. It bears the name of the black devil, having been feared with the word initials G. Always creeps, rustling by chaos, life force causing it to doggedly survive, struggling in the shadows moving at high speed. If you are flying in the air, the Earth, enemy of the strong which cause abnormalities in a state of confusion and panic in restaurants, they are soldiers of unique magic.

The name of… cockroach.

The cockroach is, at the bottom of this underground space, millions, several tens of millions, no their wriggling had no measurement. It was an incomparable sea of cockroaches. The leathery unpleasant sound was the sound of cockroaches rubbing against each other.

“So, what things… look…”

“Yeah, so many, lots and lots.”

With blue faces, Suzu and Shizuku look away as well. They both had goosebumps on their arms. The other members were pretty much the same. In particular, Shia’s rabbit ears were now hanging down, she was desperate to cover up the sound now that she knew what it was. She buried her head in her hands and squatted down, her eyes teary.

“….Hajime, will burn them.”

Yue unusually says a dangerous thing, but Tio and Kaori seemed to already have the same intention. Their desire to see the things destroyed were indicated by the look in the eyes and the goosebumps on their skin.

“It might be better to stop… that number? I suggest… what if they flew in large quantities?”

“……” x3

Thousands of cockroaches coming flying up all at once at them, Hajime proposed. Yue lost her fighting spirit, and her face changed into a complicated expression. Apparently, the heart was broken in an instant.

“If we don’t fall, I think it’s okay. I think… as… I’ll advance first and stop any that come up quickly. It might only attack when we stop.”

Everyone wore a more serious expression that they previously had at Hajime’s words, they gave firm nods.

Hajime traveled out on top of the thick branch passage. For now, there was only the goal of advancing along the road, but since the place was major scaffolding, there appeared to be a joined branch passage in the distance which he supposed was where he was going to aim.

Along the way, the roaches had not jumped up or been startled and they had made it from the entry branch to the next branch aisle. Things looked good, and then…

A feared sound was heard.

Vu… vuvuvuvuvuvuvuvuvu!!!

It was flapping sounds, in a large amount.

“!?”

Hajime who confirms with a look below. Sure enough, a brown tsunami was coming stretching out and rising as flapping hordes of cockroaches emerged with a furious spectacle.

“Uo… it’s covered!!”

“Hey, oh, oh-oh!!”

“Hyiii!!”

“Come now, oh, oh!”

“—-!!”

Everyone was raising cries of disgust as they prepared for the biggest attack of their lives.

Hajime shot rockets from Orukan. Yue used her “thunder dragon”, Shia fought with burst slug ammunition out of the Doryukken, Tio invoked breath, and Kaori released decomposition while Kouki’s group used whatever long distance attacks they could muster.

Blooming flowers of crimson perched below, roars of thunder. Spreading ripples of blue light, cut blank flashes of black and silver. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to declare overwhelming annihilation. If this force was put in front of the kingdom and the imperial army, surely, they would oblige to leave this world.

However, the attack didn’t dent the mountainside of blossoming black tsunami coming towards them. Attacking the sea itself is the same as pointless. The tsunami of cockroaches jumped freely in the movement spread throughout space as birds do in perfect order.

“It is terrible! Holy shield!””

Already half crying, Suzu put up a barrier.

Shortly after, the Zaa Aaaa continued move up into the sky. A wave of cockroaches descended as if attracted by gravity and pounced towards Hajime’s party.

The roaches hit the walls, the momentum causing tons to smoosh and sprinkle their fluids as the survivors crawl all over the barrier wall.

“No, ri…”

Suzu’s barrier stretched under the weight and she started to lose consciousness. Kouki resists losing heart and tries to give out an encouraging voice over the desperation.

“Suzu, don’t pass out. If you become unconscious we all die. Keep up your spirit!”

Which was part of the attack. To be swallowed by the wave of cockroaches in flesh and blood, but it's an attack on the spirit as much as a magical attack. These kind of abnormalities couldn't be avoided. On the contrary, they could traumatize you for life.

"Yue, take over the defense!"

"…Nn, will absolutely not be broken."

Yue deployed her holy shield to superimpose the one Suzu had raised up with an arm covered in goosebumps. The outside of the barrier was stained black with cockroaches crawling and rustling.

"Somehow, it has been like this since I came to this labyrinth."

"Extremely messy huge labyrinth. Well, this one assumes you've beaten several of these others and have obtained their cheats so it raises the difficulty up several steps."

"It would be very difficult if you did not have time to analyze things calmly."

"Kaori, it's okay, there is no problem. That out there is just a black sesame thing. Black sesame pudding or black sesame furikake and I quite like it. Especially black sesame furikake seasoning soy sauce flavored. That's delicious. Rice is great."

"Shizuku-chan! Oh no! I broke the already fragile Shizuku-chan."

Kaori gives a heartbreaking cry as Shizuku's pupils go dead. Meanwhile, Hajime reaches into the "treasure room" and starts preparing for extermination while rubbing the goosebumps on his arms.

However, before that happens.

The cockroaches that flocked to the barrier drew in unison. The wave of cockroach in front of everything move into a sphere of air, producing a circular ring to surround the center.

Superimposed further circular rings on the outer periphery of the giant circular ring form. The next cockroach column begins to sequence around the ring. Gradually, the sight begins to form a geometric pattern created in the air. Hajime's cheek twitched.

"Hey, Hey, Hey, believe it or not. Are they forming a magic circle?"

Once a magic circle was formed by Nointo handling and lining up its silver feathers formerly in the air. The countless cockroaches were now doing the same thing. Hajime and the other's declared "how gross" and continued their attack simultaneously.

However, the wave of cockroaches lay ahead so that the spear in the center of the magic circle was maintained.

It'll be a meat wall literally, and Hajime's and the others attacks were obstructed. A dead body of the cockroaches where were blown away fell in a torrential downpour into the lower part, but this did not decrease the number at all.

While continuing to fight in this way, the magic circle seemed to be completed. Close to fifteen meters in diameter it floated in the air, a magic circle emitting light of intense red and black. And when it burst

the next moment, a central sphere which consists of cockroaches began to rise and change shape. It was a huge cockroach of about three meters at full length, at last.

But rather than taking the oval form as cockroaches around it, it came with a needle-like tail and a torso similar to a centipede, complete with 10 legs. Its front feet had sharp finger like knives. The face had black color eyes, and a sharp chin, along with three pairs, six total translucent wings. Perhaps this was a monster of the boss class.

“Gigi Chchichichichichichi chip!!!”

The boss cockroach wore dark red phosphorescent color and emits unpleasant cries. Then the cockroaches gathered around further, beginning to for another magic square. Apparently, the boss cockroach could control the other cockroaches. A rather small sphere begins to be formed, plenty in the center of a new magical center. It isn’t the boss cockroach, but it’s clear that a special cockroach appears big.

“Tch… what to do?”

“….Nn!?”

Suddenly a torrent of the magic generated the moment Hajime and Yue tried to make an attack on the magic circle from their footing.

The both turned their eyes down immediately, but there was nothing in a branch aisle to hold. However, his magic eye caught that further down the branch aisle, on the other side of the aisle, out of sight, the cockroaches were forming another magic circle.

It was trying to focus their attention on it, probably forming a magic flash to hide the other circle. Bad Hajime! It was actuated already the moment Hajime realized that.

Red and black magic was transmitted through the branch passage along the scaffold. Hajime protected his face from the intense light. After the flash exploded, it wrapped the surrounding region and settled there. Hajime and the others appeared intact.

What on earth was it? Hajime looked next to him to Yue while suspecting.

“……”

The feeling that welled up within Hajime at that moment was not relief for her safety and was not the usual love, it was…

–It was hate.

Chapter 31 – Was Something Reversed?

Disgust, no, the best word was hatred. Such a deep, dark feeling, Hajime felt for… Yue.

It was apparent that Yue felt the same way. Her eyes were distorted with a murderous look as she glanced at Hajime as well.

“Yue.”

“…. Hajime.”

They called each other’s names with familiarity, but with a sort of discomfort as well.

“… I completely despise you.”

“…. I feel nothing but hate.”

With strong emotion, the pair pull out weapons and raise them at each other. Hajime aims Donna straight at Yue’s forehead, while Yue lifts up a flame in her right hand. The words “Oh?” and “Who first?” hung in the air like a classic scene in a Yakuza shop.

“Hey, what are you two doing?”

A voice came forth between the two. It was Shia. Her left shoulder holding Doryukken, her posture like she was about to attack, with a very restrained voice.

“Shouldn’t the one you want to kill be me? Don’t be selfish.”

Like Hajime and Yue, Shia stared at them with hate and malice in her eyes.

Hajime also had negative feelings towards Shia that rivaled the murderous feeling he had for Yue. When Hajime gritted his teeth and looked around, he felt death glares from Tio and Kaori as well. They looked at Yue, Shia, and Hajime all with hate-filled eyes.

“Oh, hey guys. What are you guys doing? Nagumo is just Nagumo.”

It’s Kouki. Kouki seems to be protecting Hajime while giving Yue and the others a stern glare. His eyes seem to hold a great deal of affection for Hajime as he accuses the others of acting strange.

Ryuutaro and Suzu did not seem to share any particular strong feelings against Hajime. Rather, Ryuutaro seemed to be giving Kouki a look of disgust. Shizuku also seems to have hate in her eyes when she looks at Hajime, and a condemning look for Kouki, and a downright murderous look for Kaori.

Fortunately, the “holy shield” barrier was still being maintained by Yue. The swarm of roaches had surged again, trying to catch Hajime and rest off-guard during this abnormality, as the group just glared at each other.

More cockroaches gather into magic circles, attempting to create more special cockroaches outside their protective barrier. Another tsunami of cockroaches flies by, buying them a bit of time.

Hajime analyzed the effect of the light magic using “detect magic” and judged it against his changing emotions to take a guess at the situation now.

“Apparently, the light magic we felt a moment ago seems to have reversed our emotions. The intensity is proportional to the strength of the original emotion.”

“… Nn, reasonable conclusion, I unwillingly agree.”

Hajime explains without turning away; Yue agrees with a disgusted look. Even though the feeling is reversed, they didn’t lose their memories. By inferring from memory how they original thought about each other, it was likely the correct guess.

While holding angry looks, no one else raised an objection.

“The extent of this trial… You can still remember, but the emotion has been reversed. It’s difficult to shake off what you remember versus how you feel. It’s a disgusting ordeal. The deeper the bond, the more it’ll try to tear it apart.”

As Tio explained the extent of this trial, she started blushing as she watched the cockroaches crawling on the outer wall, clogging her words. The allure of the cockroaches seem to jam up every one’s words; it was Kaori who managed to put it into words.

“…. look so pretty.”

So that was also a problem. For the black devils that they would hold as enemies, the hate was flipped. Instead of being repulsed, Hajime and the others only felt endeared by the cockroaches. It was only their memories of disliking them that kept their guard up.

Their emotions were inverted. They needed no more evidence to support that conjecture. The allies with the deepest bonds would be cut, their capacity to defend themselves weakened by their hatred. That might be the goal. Especially against these demonic cockroaches, they certainly had to hold on to their disgust.

With the group unable to cooperate, they’d be swallowed by the tsunami of cockroaches, or fall prey to the medium-sized ones about 1 meter in length. These boss cockroaches were being produced one after another.

It wouldn’t go amiss to call this a desperate situation. … However, the current people here were far from ordinary.

“… It’s the mountains of cockroaches I want to kill.”

“… I’d like to kill them, as well as you.”

Hajime and Yue stared out at the cockroaches. Their eyes seemed to penetrate through the cockroaches pressed up against the outer wall, contemplating on the boss cockroach that had created this situation.

“… More than that.”

“… Than that.”

Hajime and Yue’s eyes flashed with brutal glare. Yue, who usually doesn’t show much expression, wore an aggressive look like that of a wild wolf, her eyes narrowed. Dwelling in those eyes was a fierce anger like never before.

“I like to love… man, I want to kill!”

“…. I want to love him and be cherished.”

Two heads reached a boil.

Their anger gushed out, hot like magma. They remembered how they had previously felt for each other. The cockroaches had messed with their feelings. No one should trifle with those important feelings between two people in love.

Even against roaches, dislike and anger weren't enough to describe the ferocity that they felt for the cockroaches, something that changed to something sadistic. The feelings grew to a bitterness over the nature of the entire labyrinth up to this moment as well.

And Hajime and Yue weren't the only ones.

Kouki and the others flinched from the pressure of the overwhelming anger emitted from Hajime and Yue, causing them to retreat. But behind them, Shia, Tio, and even Kaori wore eyes red with anger that could only be described as demonic.

Yue opened up the "Holy Barrier", causing Kouki and the others to caste looks of skepticism and panic. Red magic began to spread out from Hajime's feet. His lip is lifted, his canine exposed, and a look of absolute murder on his face.

Shortly after,

Zudooon!!

Hajime leaped from the passage like a single bullet, the roar leaving behind a crater in the middle of branch where his feet previously were. Using an ability like "ground shrink", mixed with "enhanced legs" and "impact change", his body moved like a bomb with body reinforcement of pure magic. The "body reinforcement" was applied to the whole body, making him harder than steel, and his body was covered in "Lightning Clad" and red magic, appearing like the embodiment of thunder.

Unable to stop Hajime, Suzu's "Holy Barrier" was easily destroyed from the inside like waste paper. Hajime rushes the boss cockroach with the intent to destroy it.

"I'll love you until death."

The boss cockroach couldn't even react, its visual recognition unable to match the speed of Hajime moving like a madman with a screw loose.

Suddenly, the cockroach didn't seem so dangerous. Maybe it was because they reverse their feelings, or didn't expect someone to sneak out during the siege of cockroaches, but this demon boss seemed rather… simple?

Hajime, as the weapon he was, took out his anger on the cockroach, delivering a fatal blow, using the momentum of his rush combined with a knee kick.

GAAAAAAN

With the resounding roar of steel on steel, the boss cockroach disappeared a second later, Hajime appearing in its spot. The boss cockroach had blown away at an unperceivable speed.

Hajime remained in place using the "aerodynamic" to stand still, receiving the glares and murderous intent as he looked at the direction the boss cockroach was blown away.

On the other side, once Hajime had taken off….

Suzu was panicking, desperately trying to bring back the barrier that he had taken out. However, the cockroaches that drew near no longer disgusted her. Was there a good reason to stay away from the cockroaches? In fact, aren't they desirable? While thinking this, she lost to the spell.

The cockroaches in this labyrinth are just insects… after all.

Yue stood up to fill the fatal gap in Suzu's actions to rectify the situation.

"Shaking heaven."

Around Yue and the others, space itself seemed to wave for a moment. She had started to show the full extent of her god-level magic.

Just as the wave of cockroaches was about to reach them, Space began to explode. The tremendous power generated shock waves that crushed into the cockroaches, crushing them in small pieces, and a moment later only sand remained.

Yue was not finished yet. "Five Heaven Dragons."

The moment that magic name sounded from her lovely voice, thunder, the blue flame, the storm, the snow and ice, the five bodies of dragons appeared. As tens of thousands of cockroaches rushed towards them, Yue's dragons circled around them with a distinctive roar and were decimated in an instant.

Yue began to float up with the use of her gravity magic without a glance back to the others. Her body began to rush towards the boss cockroach along with the whole body of the dragon in free fall.

As a formation of 200 medium-sized cockroaches made an attack formation against Hajime, Shia blew it away.

Shia, Tio, and Kaori had all realized, much like Yue in the beginning, that their affection for Hajime had been played with. The cockroaches looming above who had chosen to reverse their emotions were met with a fierce anger raging beyond the intentions of the labyrinth. (Translation Note: In other words, don't mess with the dere or you get the yan.)

Shia lept into the air with magically reinforced legs, scampering across the sky on light blue disks that rippled with beautiful blue light. Also, Tio and Kaori respectively expanded their dragon wings and sliver wings from their backs, leaping up at once as they met glares with the mid-sized cockroaches.

"Oh, hey, I no longer find you repugnant. However, I've still decided that you die."

"That, That's right. Bug-chan is cute but… I can't die, and I have to fight as expected, don't I?"

"Yes, but decapitate them? Such dear creatures?"

"If we don't kill, then we'll be killed. We must be strong, and fight strong, so that we aren't left behind."

Though, it's shameful to say that to them, the Cockroaches might as well have been a Chihuahua staring at them with round eyes as they tried to aim for its neck. It was like trying to kill a small dog that you'd loved from birth. It was these messed up and crazy inconsistencies that they had to deal with, but couldn't help but think that way.

The remaining people from Kouki's party couldn't fly freely through the sky, stranding them at the center of the branch passage. They began to fight passively. They battled side by side and shoulder to shoulder with people they didn't like. It was a troublesome feeling.

～～～～～～～～～～～～～～～～～～～～～～～～

The boss cockroach that had received Hajime's flying knee kick had flown off into the trunk of the big tree, sinking magnificently and being blown to bits by the furious momentum. An abdomen that would have taken pride as having the strength of steel was pounded radially centering on the part that received the direct hit, whitish body fluid spilling out from the newly formed hole.

"Gichichichichichichichi!"

The boss cockroach made an unpleasant cry sound while swinging its antennae. A group of cockroaches immediately swarm around the boss cockroach, dissolving into its form in an instant, assimilating and curing the injury the boss had sustained. As long as the small cockroaches remained, they'd be able to keep fighting indefinitely.

The boss cockroach picks out a splinter that had embedded itself into the cockroach from the big tree. The cockroach seems bigger now as it lets out an unpleasant sound.

The cockroach eyes glanced around for the one who injured him…

"Still, let me enjoy this a bit more."

It seemed like hitting the abdomen just cured the impact further. The roaring sound once again came as steel struck steel. Hajime had quietly approached from the side and send in a Yakuza style kick.

The boss cockroach sinks into the trunk again. Hajime began to attack it mercilessly like a wild beast. Do not use weapons. Hajime had no intention on ending the moment. Applying a "magic shockwave" to his fist and reinforcing his body with magic, he quickly undercuts the bosom of the boss cockroach with another and then another.

Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong!
Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong!
Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong!
Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong! Dugong!

Every time a fist in Hajime's left or right struck, the form of the boss cockroach twists like a toy, but seems unable to escape, its body being embedded into the cracking trunk of the big tree radially. The cockroach is replaced with a glossy black piece of meat and white blood mixed in shattered wood chip.

The boss cockroach was a foe where even if a physiological hate could be held, its form was too dreadful, although it only looked pathetic in its current form.

A moment later red and black light began to emit from the boss cockroach. A great deal of cockroaches appeared in the route behind Hajime's back, and with a dreadful speed they formed into a magic circle.

Black smoke emerged from the magic circle, overflowing and assaulting Hajime with furious speed.

"…. Tsh."

Hajime judged that being touched by the black smoke was bad and evacuated with “aerodynamic” and “ground shrink” before it reach him. Where Hajime was an instant before, smoke wrapped around the boss cockroach and the great tree.

With a moment free of Hajime, the boss calls for a group of cockroaches. A large amount of cockroaches rush into their own black smoke.

After a few seconds, the boss cockroach regained its form, removing the wounds and shaking off the black smoke. The tree behind the cockroach that had been exposed to black smoke had collapsed, seeping down the trunk as a gray mush. Apparently, the black smoke had some kind of corrosive effect.

The boss cockroach’s six wings began to shake at a high speed, BIIIIII! The boss cockroach took off at high speed. Hajime entered high speed flight to give the cockroach his regards once again, quickly overshadowing it simultaneously as the cockroach assumed a posture of struggle.

The accelerating Hajime circles around the cockroach again and rushes, blocking off its retreat. At the same time, a tsunami of cockroaches begin to slope up behind Hajme. While giving the cockroaches a smile as if he was saying “What is it, cutie?” he jerks out his left arm, he drew out some weapons. He had a mind to attack from the front while letting the cross bit attack from behind.

A wall of air appeared around the boss cockroach. It had made it to the speed of sound. They didn’t know if the branch passages would give way to the shockwave and vacuum and become destroyed. He also would be destroyed if he tried to avoid the tree at the last moment.

Still, Hajime showed no intention of leaving, even as the vibration smashed against his artificial arm. He attacked directly from the front.

Just then, a huge dragon of thunder and another clad in blue flames broke through the wall of cockroaches behind him and appeared.

Hajime feels it coming, and without looking back gives a face as if to say “Yuck.” However, the cockroach is already in sonic speed. The ‘blinking light’ perceptive abilities were already being stretched many times, and it was already hopeless.

“Why, I was!”

He delivered a single blow. An outburst of the elbow and “magic shockwave” mixed with fire at the same time, struck the boss cockroach straight on. The cockroach was also stretching its leg with a clawlike sharp blade, but was eluded completely with the intense cross counter. The face of the boss cockroach was pounded in detail with the effect of vibrations smashing and spreading across the creature in waves.

The impact on the front of the head caused the cockroach to round vertically and fly off in the direction of the day after tomorrow.

Immediately after, the roaches aiming for Hajime were consumed by Yue’s dragons in the spot Hajime just was.

“…. Thank you, removed.”

“Was that for me? Or those dear cockroach-kun.”

"… Of course, the yellow cockroaches."

"Hey, what's that? I'm getting things going. It looks like a new cockroach species?"

Hajime moved next to Yue, wearing an unhappy face. Yue floats a very hateful smile towards Hajime disdainfully. Hajime, who held up through the offensive of the thunder dragon and the blue flame dragon while narrowly escaping floated a blue vein on his forehead, but where does the wind blow?

"Your intention was to kill me."

"… Of course not, at your level there was no reason to believe you'd be killed."

"Oh, certainly, but could you have attacked worse than that?"

The two wore an atmosphere of disgust towards each other, being in a state where they dislike each other more than anyone, that's the effects of the emotion reversal, yet still they were able to trust each other in combat.

The boss cockroach had approached the sonic speed while still wearing the black smoke of imperceptible corrosion. It turned out Yue could take it on easier from the front and engaged without thinking.

Furthermore, the large tsunami of cockroaches were approaching. If you looked closely, a small cockroach was wrapped in a black haze. The boss cockroach draws near from Yue's side as the pair acknowledge the sea of corrosion.

"Hey you, that smoke decays everything. Don't let it touch your clothing or things might become erotic."

"… Perhaps for a rotten character like you. I'm sure I'm resistant."

They spit venom at each other without hesitation, cutting words at close range.

Meanwhile, the black smoke coalesced into a black tidal wave of corrosion around the boss cockroach moving at sonic speeds, targeting Yue and Hajime in a manner that was anything but disordered.

However, it seemed like the two couldn't be bruised.

The black smoke rushed in making a sonic boom, reaching out for the two people in front, and they instantly moved away, dancing around the streams of smoke as they glared at each other.

Their movements seemed impossible to follow, Hajime had drawn Donna and began firing while Yue used her finger as a baton, creating a dragon with the body of a tornado.

Six of Hajime's bullets shot out in a flash, landing in the forehead of the boss cockroach at the same place and time. The boss cockroaches head explodes, and which is blown off, sending it into a tailspin once again.

Meanwhile the black tidal wave was engulfed with the colors of five dragons. The thunder dragon left only remnants of roaches while the blue dragon annihilated them completely. The ice dragon froze them while the stone dragon petrified them, 100,000 at a time.

"You're playing through them quickly, will you run out?"

“… Even without material, I’ll play.”

While the cockroaches rain down like a torrential downpour, the boss continues to take in small cockroaches with each movement in a move that only feels desperate. Yue and Hajime’s voices could be heard, looking up with crescent shaped mouths and laughter like devils.

It probably wasn’t a conscious action. It was a more instinctual thing. It’s instinctually realized that it touched a presence that should never ever be touched and became an enemy.

“Gigi iiii!!”

The boss cockroach clad in the black smoke of corrosion began to panic and gave a scream. More small cockroaches were called, and as they approached the boss they became clad in the black corrosion as well before compressing.

The smoke seems to compress into a black shell, creating hundreds of shots. And of course, the shells maintain the corrosive properties. So the boss was creating corrosive ammunition out of the small cockroaches. Effects of the instantaneous corrosion and compression left an uneven smoke.

The boss released a shockwave, sending out the corrosive shells which struck and corroded a branch aisle the moment it was pierced. It headed for Hajime and the rest rapidly.

“…. Wasteful.”

Yue uttered a word. Shortly after, a gate forms right in front of Hajime and Yue and spreads. The spatial magic does a spatial field that becomes an invincible shield at the same time. The shell that would corrode anything the instant it lands, couldn’t avoid passing through the developed gate and disappearing into somewhere. It’s a perfectly wasteful ball as Yue had said.

But the boss cockroach, now in a complete state of panic can only half acknowledge that. Averting the orbit while screaming, it bypasses the gate to rush at Yue. However, the gate wasn’t simply a place to banish the cannonballs away.

“Kyiii!?”

Just after increasing its speed and detouring, it struck something in the air, and as it was caught it became a whole body crucifixion.

“Its movements are simple. Is its mind still only that of a cockroach?” Hajime murmurs so next to Yue as he makes his stone ring react.

The ring had been connected to the bola beforehand. The boss cockroach expected a route, its eyes on the gate while Hajime established the bola in the air simultaneously.

And the wire used for this bola is extra fine, so-called steel thread. Steel thread could be stretched as the effect given by generation magic “sign insulation” concealed an ore part of the bola, and a cobweb might be spread in the air.

The boss cockroach had rammed into the net, ready to catch it if the cockroach touched. And carefully, the bola matched the impact of the rush and entangled, securing the boss cockroach in the air as it is.

While spitting curses and strangely trusting each other, the pair continued to fight back to back without hesitation, sharing in the defense and attack without requiring a wink of conversation…

Were these guys really hating each other under the emotion reversal? If the boss cockroach could say words, it surely would have grandly Tsukkomi'd asking as such.

"I wonder, Yue…"

"… Hmm?"

Hajime inclines his neck while spearing the eye of the boss cockroach, continuing to harass it while it remained crucified in his web.

"I think my feelings of hate are starting to fade… it's about halfway gone now. I'm able to stand it."

"… coincidence. I also feel that Hajime is bearable. And with the cockroaches, I don't feel the need to love them."

"Oh, indeed."

Tio guessed that the emotion reversal was another trial of the great labyrinth. Like the pleasure hell that chooses viscous liquid of milky slime, Hajime also inferred that it could be conquered. After all, it'd be a troublesome place if you're feeling reverse could never be conquered and you ended up hating your partners forever.

However, Hajime and Yue fought together to overcome it by nature, or so it seems.

Potential? After having your spirit upset by feeling the reversal, and the cruel treatment center filled with making the boss cockroach, the feeling of turning back may be tempting.

Alternatively, it may be that the two of them exerted a simple and mysterious ability of creating pink space anytime, anywhere.

In any case, it reminded Hajime of a quote about "every time not being a possibility" that certain working authorities once murmured.

"Well, Yue, since you're acting playfully, how about one last game with Mr. Cockroach?"

"… Nn. Winning is possible if you like your opponent."

Again, two people show a smile that could only come from a devil. Absolutely, are we sure they had a feeling's reversal? Is that really likely? An observer might have tsukkumi'd.

The boss cockroach has finished restoring its body and managed to sneak out of the bola's restriction with the use of the black smoke of corrosion. It wore black smoke and again produces three to six shock waves and a vacuum blade with a flap of its wings.

However, the boss cockroach shouldn't be negligent. Up to this moment, Hajime had been pulling his hand. He refused to use heinous weapons, no direct attacks by powerful magic. Not even attack while playing. He was playing to the full level.

Things that were not perceived were the complete lack of aggressive intention. Demon or not, the creatures body showed the miserable result.

Hajime appeared at the back of the boss cockroach, inserting centrifugal force with body strengthening, hammering down with an aerial turning kick into the back of the boss cockroach with an instant move.

“Giiiii!?”

The boss cockroach which made a noise curved like a shrimp with its shell in the air and blew away. The black smoke of corrosion should have been worn, but with Hajime covered in bright red magic, it did not seem to affect him at all.

Blown away at intense Gs, the boss cockroach desperately tried to regain its balance. Yue appears from a spatial change right in front of the boss cockroach, waving her had slightly in front of it.

Immediately after, space become Gyobo! A shock wave with some directionality makes a noise, and shrinks, and generates the power by which space turns back at the next moment.

“GIIII!?”

The boss cockroach which is assaulted by a dreadful impact from the front like a pinball this time blows off in the direction of the day after tomorrow. The surface of the body is ragged already, but that’s just the start.

Hajime had already moved position. Once again, an intense kick blows the cockroach away. Blown away, and still, to Yue, blown again. Back to Hajime.

Hajime and Yue hit each other, such as the air tennis with a boss cockroach ball. Echoing are the heartbreaking cries of the boss cockroach in the vast underground space. The boss is moving so fast and irregularly that the swarms of cockroaches are unable to have time to help.

The corrosive smoke doesn’t affect Hajime and doesn’t touch Yue to begin with. Yue’s body is able to repair any damage before she’s even aware, so there is no risk of dying.

Their play seems to be the doing of devils and fiends. Using up and playing with their love by this trial in the labyrinth might have turned them into such.

Further, a rule of the game is loss of the person who failed in the rally first.

“…. Hajime.”

And, in the middle of their rally, suddenly received sense talk from Yue. Because they are moving at high speed with changing distances, this was necessary. Hajime replies while flicking the boss cockroach with an overhead kick.

“What happened?”

“Oh,… Hajime.”

“Mm. What is it?”

“Hajime… Hajime… Hajime… Nn….”

Yue just kept calling Hajime's name repeatedly by sense talk for a while. The tone seemed to be changing into something more spoiled like. Hajime begins to notice it in the tone. In the feeling.

"Yue, back?"

"… Nn… perfection. For Hajime?"

"Yes, me too… there is only pure malice for this cockroach any more, and for Yue…"

"…. Me?"

Hajime packs in a word without leaving a torrent of the feelings taken away. Such as having the opposite feeling for Yue even for just a moment. He didn't want to think about it. The violent malice as well as the anger for the boss cockroach rose up once again, but he had to say the words to his sweetheart where there were once cruel words.

When he took a deep breath, Hajime used sense talk while looking at Yue, who had changed ahead of the boss cockroach and blew it straight for Hajime.

"There is only love."

"Nn… me too."

The voice that seems wonderful and sounds dear to Hajime. Feelings of thousands of emotions were included and the word floods through his chest. Hajime and Yue stay in the air just as it is, saying only those words with patience even if it has to be seen. The boss cockroach with discharged body fluid flied overhead, but the two people's eyes don't look away. It was just Yue and Hajime.

They say nothing, when the distance between them disappear, and two people embrace in midair. Their lips meet naturally. Light kiss without words, only just touch, as if the thought was more than enough.

Hajime holds Yue's slender waist and Yue wraps her arm around Hajime. Their lips release as the two of them confirm that the feelings inside them are normal once again, staring close distance, with smiles on their faces.

The boss cockroach which had finished playing around at that point gave them some distraction. With a scream, it dispatched cockroaches which rised up simultaneously.

That won't be the light one such as tidal waves any more. They were forcibly trying to close the space with cockroaches. A huge dome began to form heading up towards Yue and Hajime. Hajime had long since lost track of what happened to Kouki and the others.

The dome was filled with black smoke of corrosion. When seen from the outside, the surface seemed to rustle, the mountain rising where it could be seen. The underground space where the big tree was made at the center was buried with a mountain of cockroaches, mostly.

The cockroaches had managed to accumulate not just at the bottom, but also the ceiling and walls as well. If someone said all the cockroaches in the world were gathered here, it'd not be surprising.

And the space was closing quickly with cockroaches in the next moment GoGYUUU! It was reduced quickly with the sounds that suggested so.

Will they be crushed to death or captured inside of the ocean of cockroaches? The center is of course Yue and Hajime. At the end of the underground space, there was Shia striking down a medium-sized cockroach and leaving it for Kouki's group to defeat. They also seem to have exceeded the pile of cockroaches a short while ago. It also seems to come off from an area by a compressed thing.

The boss cockroach is entering a reduced sphere directly while flapping. Closed space of a hug cockroach was in the compressed state so that there were no gaps to the interior already.

"Gichichichichichichichi!"

The boss cockroach makes an unpleasant sound. That seemed to be an attempt to clear it's former humiliation as a ball, and it seemed to be the roar convinced of a victory.

But that will be overturned immediately after. A cockroach was repelled from a spherical center, trying to find the dead body from the center of the sphere of cockroaches.

"Oh, you want a fervent embrace?"

Yue, putting both hands together, was seen there with her eyes closed to concentrate. Next to her is Hajime, who laughs dauntlessly within the 4 point barrier.

The boss cockroach stops, instinctively taking a step back.

The fear of being teased by these two people ran deep, but that's because the power they exuded was feared above all else.

A gap formed that Yue could put out both hands together. They flash blue, and in the meantime a small group of flames begin to swirl around.

When seeing that, they seem to have just done the flame systems finest aggressive spell "blue sky". When ordinarily thinking, making "blue sky" can excel in some small extermination. It'd seem like an insignificant act.

But genius magician Yue wouldn't do such a nonsense thing.

The blue flame between the two hands, the splendor is increased from moment to moment. On the contrary, it kept burning. It's as if looking to crate small stars.

"… Selection." Yue muttered quietly.

Then, the finished fist-sized orb oozes blue aura.

The bead of blue flame which contains a power and identity that was unknown.

That one was for the boss cockroach. The cockroach realized it'd be completely destroyed. If not, they'd make it understand. The cockroach let out a scream, pushing cockroaches and black smoke against the four-point boundary to break it and kill the pair and break the orb before it was too late.

However, the action was too late too. Well no, whatever action the cockroach would take would be the same thing. There's no way to stop it now.

Yue hung the blue flame orb towards the sky. Yue illuminated Blue Star gave its own appearance that was far too mysterious and beautiful. Hajime gently hugged Yue's body from behind. Yue had entrusted her back to Hajime to fawn after all.

And,

"… Divine flame."

Like the judgement of god himself, the pulsating blue overran the entire place.

Chapter 132 – One Hope

"Divine Flame," she commanded in a pretty voice edged with cruelty.

Shortly after, the function of the annihilation magic became apparent.

The blue flame began to pulsate with a Dukan sound. Blue light spread around the underground space and began to swell from inside. As the ripples spread like ripple of water triggered by a drop of water, there seemed to be an ominous quite that was devoid of mercy.

The cockroaches that were touched by the blue light did not offer even the slightest resistance, merely disappearing without even ash remaining.

At the sight of this divine flame, the boss cockroach ran like a scared rabbit, a scream was caught in the light of the spreading blue that ballooned away from Yue before the boss cockroach unceremoniously disappeared without another sound.

Without the boss cockroach, the small and medium cockroaches that were being fought by Shia and Kouki's group became confused at the loss of leadership, and became trivial nuisances. The blue light continued to spread, it swallowed the cockroaches around Shia as well.

As the flame spread out, Kouki and the others watched it approach with anxious looks.

It wasn't unreasonable for them to feel rushed. They were able to see the destruction in front of them.

The reason was clear. Kouki, Shia, and the others weren't sure whether the flame that destroyed the cockroaches so completely would hurt them as well. However, it was not simply Shia and the rest that remained unharmed. The large tree trunk and branches remained intact as well.

They gave Hajime and Yue surprised looks when they realized that the flame that spread across the underground space and completely devastated the cockroaches only affected those cockroaches.

–Divine Flame

A flame type superlative magic which shot "blue flames" rapidly 10 times into the space around and compressed it with gravity magic. Yue further specified the magic with "selection" using spirit magic, so that it avoided those whom contained souls. (Translation Note: Cockroaches don't go to heaven)

Anyone Yue permits survives while it seeks out those she sets as an enemy.

That is, indeed, suitable to be called art. It wouldn't be unreasonable to say that a god named Yue passed judgement from heaven.

“Unexpected magic… Indeed expected from Yue.”

“Nn… Praise me more, please?”

As the light of the flames started to go out, the voices of the two of them echoed in the underground space.

Indeed Yue showed some signs of exhaustion, so Hajime gave Yue a big hug in reward for her hard work. Yue wrapped her arms around Hajime’s neck and allowed her entire body to relax against him. And just like that, she kissed his neck, followed by the sound of sucking as she bit and lapped up his blood.

“When saying it like that, I wonder who won this match.”

While Yue stuck to the scruff of Hajime’s neck and drank his blood, he held her with one arm, while gently stroking her hair with the other. And so he was reminded of and questioned the outcome of the game the pair of them had started.

“…. Nn, haa… Nn. My win. Hajime will not disagree.”

Yue separates from Hajime with an ecstatic expression, her eyes were as bewitching as always as she licked her lips.

“Yue, I must ask, does it really matter how won or lost, does it mean so much?”

“… Hehe. Well, then, I guess we can put that aside for now.”

As the pair of them spoke casually, discussing things ‘just in case’, there came another loud voice.

“Are you guys going to flirt forever, or can you rejoin the rest of us!”

“Yes! Yue is cheating! Hajime-kun and I are… anyway, please return!”

It was Shia and Kaori. They were beckoning us to return right alongside Kouki and the rest. Tio merely shrugged her shoulders. They were trying to take their feelings into account and had been waiting. Kouki and the others looked a bit uncomfortable, Suzu and Shizuku had their eyes lowered and blushes on their cheeks. It looked like they had been watching Yue and Hajime from a distance.

From their reactions, it looked like their feelings had returned to normal as well. Hajime didn’t know if they had returned under their own power or if it was the result of the boss cockroach dying.

The pair stared at each other and gave another light kiss before returned to a place beside Shia.

“You kissed so casually at the end…”

“I’m envious… but… but… It’s good to see you’re safe. Although I felt like… “not only you!” or “me too!” but I don’t want to sound selfish…”

“Indeed, as expected of Yue and Hajime. Battling in a world alone, tossing him around like a toy, it wasn’t as pitiful as expected.” (Translation Note: I think this is Tio claiming she wishes she was the boss cockroach getting kicked around by Hajime, lol).

There were three people which came away with three different responses, but it was Shia's words that had the biggest impact. Hajime gives her a hug with one hand without releasing Yue. She doesn't seem to mind at all. However, Kouki and company wore mixed expressions over his nerve.

"… Did you recover your feelings on your own?"

"You could say I return on the way, yes…"

"Would, um. May I ask that you had returned to normal without help?"

Kaori looks doubtful about Yue's question to Shia. Tio adds the explanation while forcing a smile.

"You may say that I also returned without help. I assume that the trigger was jealousy over the war declaration between master and Yue? This mistress was envious of their fervent love. However, soon they did not even bother with the cockroaches, just each other…. Was that the same for Shia and Kaori as well?"

"Yes, it was…"

"Yup…"

So it was that sort of thing. Hajime glanced over to Kouki's group to see how they were doing.

"……" X3

"Well, -how is it? The last cockroach to die was back to being unpleasant."

Shizuku appeared to be the only one to recover on her own. It was expected of Shizuku given her mental strength. Kouki and the others must have received even more damage as they had to watch their lovable cockroaches die all the way to the very end.

A bit later, Shia was asking Yue about the magic from a short while ago. Suddenly, a portion of the large tree near the ceiling started shining. While helping Kouki's party recover from their damages, Hajime observed a Mekimeki sound, followed by a giant branch which began to grow anew.

The branch created a new aisle as its length increase little by little. Hajime and the others remained in the four point aisle from the start of the cockroach attack until the fifth branch joined up to their intersection. The branch aisle had come from the ceiling, so it took the form of a stairway which led them up the branch to the heavens.

After a brief look at each other, Hajime and the rest hurried to follow the newly formed path.

However, Yue was holding Hajime tightly. Yue wouldn't let go and Hajime didn't try to separate. That was fine, afterall. However, Kaori also pulled from the left while a sullen Shia pulled from the right. Meanwhile, Tio clung from the back. It goes without saying that Kouki and company watched this with indescribable expressions.

When they finished climbing the fifth branch aisle, they entered another cave-like room. Hajime remained on his guard and before long a magic circle glowed and they found themselves teleported once again.

After the light settled, they could see that they were in a garden that spread out right in front of them.

The sky felt alarmingly close.

The air seemed clean. The ground spread out to roughly the size of high school gymnasium. There were trees which were relatively small and a small chalky building which had various waterways spreading out from it.

Twines surrounded the largest tree, which sat in a small island circled by canals, a central stone lithograph sitting at its base.

Tio walked into the garden, peeping over the edge.

“What do you think, master? It looks to be the top of the tree here.”

Others glance towards the bottom from the end of the garden after Tio’s word too. It’s a vast sea of clouds and an unmistakable thick fog spread out under their eyes.

“Hey, this is strange. When we flew over the sea of trees, we had crossed the dense woodland and saw no tree this big. No tree could crest the thick fog, this height must be up over 200 meters at least. It’s impossible to be seeing from a tree this high.” (Translation Note: To put that in perspective, the largest skyscrapers are around 450 meters, so they’re high, but not that high. On the other hand, the world’s tallest tree is only ~116 meters)

Hajime noticed the humor of his remark after saying it. After all, the upper part sticking out from the thick fog would only be natural, especially considering the size of the tree as seen from the ground expanding across the dense woodland.

Nevertheless, you would think that the large trees size would have been verifiable before now.

“… I see. It is concealing magic which is doing this?”

“… It is, like some kind of shadow system form of spirit magic… or is it just shifting space?”

Yue considered the magic based on Hajime’s inference. If it’s shadow magic, there should be some form of recognition obstruction, but the scaling is strange. If this were like spirit magic, they would be conscious of the alterations being made with the magic of the soul. However, they weren’t aware of any discomfort, which would be impossible considering Yue’s skill.

Hajime and his group wore impressed looks. Although they had experienced a number of trials and had managed to keep the nastiness to a minimum, there was still the liberator. Although ordinarily, the liberators did not seem ill-natured.

“Is this the goal here?” Hajime muttered.

This caused Kouki and the others to where startled expressions. “Here…. Finally…”

Hajime ignored them and walked directly to the lithograph.

The group crossed a pretty arch and entered a yen-like small island circled by a channel. The lithograph began to glow as they approached, the bright green magic flowing into the channel. So it functioned like a magic circle? Phosphorescence like fireflies raised flickeringly.

The sense to probe a memory and then inscribe knowledge by force. Hajime and the others were familiar with this. A raised voice groaned as some one else behind him was “struck” with shock and a sense of discomfort.

As the knowledge flowed into Hajime, the tree began to entangle around the lithograph and swell.

Hajime and the others assume a posture of struggle. The shape of the tree began to change, tearing away branches as it formed. Phosphorescence rose away from Hajime, forming into the image of a person’s face in the middle of the trunk. It takes on a female appearance from the shoulders up.

The person’s form is complete; the woman’s eyes open. Then, the mouth opens gently.

“First of all, I’d like to say congratulations. You’ve defeated several of the great labyrinths. I am Luluo Haltina, and I prepared the Haltina (Sea of Trees) Great Labyrinth. I apologize for the very difficult trials I prepared with the maximum regard.”

She seemed to have used the tree as a medium for her recording. This was the form instead of Oscar’s “pictures”. Luluo felt dignified like she might be connected to some form of royalty. Although some of that feeling may come from the tree stem itself, which split around her like hair, and contained a certain kind of beauty.

“However, it is also necessary. If you came through the dungeons of the other liberators, then you know about our relationship with the gods, the past tragedy, and what’s happening right now. Therefore, I wanted you the learn something about the unwavering bond that can’t be swayed, a heart that can’t be shaken. I think you who arrived here surely understand something about the strength of the heart as well as its weaknesses. I’m wishing sincerely that that is of assistance to you in the future.”

Shia listened to Luluo Haltina’s talk with a meek face. But Hajime was already impatient. He didn’t need pretentious excuses. For once, however, he quietly read the air.

“I do not know for what purpose you sought my magic, -“sublimation” magic, you are free to use it as you see fit. However, stick to your bonds, and do not drown in power.”

Hajime was already looking around restlessly. How is it? Even if he watched it, it wouldn’t change anything. He was already considering removing the lithograph to shut her off and move on already.

“My god level magic “sublimation” is the power to make everything evolve. That is the knowledge that is given. But, true value of this magic is found elsewhere.”

Hajime’s eyes widened for a moment. The hand that was hovering over Donner was returned to his side, and his eyes rested on Luluo. The real value of sublimation magic wasn’t given in the knowledge. *Tell me that first!* Hajime pointed a blaming look.

“Sublimation magic makes the “power” of everything be sublimated, literally. The other god-level magics are no exception for that…. Gravity magic, spirit magic, alteration, space magic… these mighty forces are the foundation of the management. All of which lead to further evolution… even when combined with each other. This magic would be better called “Magic concepts”.

Someone made a gulping sound, resonating the desire for such a magic.

Hajime also had his eyes opened wide in surprise. At one time, in Miledi's Raisen's labyrinth, she suggested that if he obtained all the god's level magic, he might be able to find something that would grant his desires. He needed to obtain god generation magic. It probably meant this.

"Concept magic – is the meaning which is just as it sounds. The magical manifestation of how magic acts in this world. Even if you obtain the god-level magic, it cannot be used so easily, because concept magic is invented by utmost will, not theory."

So that was the reason it couldn't be copied by magical circle.

After hearing the explanation, Hajime frowned. "Utmost will"… if it's an explanation done so lightly.

"We seven liberators worked over the course of decades and only managed three magical concepts. However, that was enough for us… but which one will you need?"

Just as Luluo said so, the lithographic center slides and something like a pocket watch comes out from the inside. Hajime takes it into his hand. One needle of the same length was fixed on a plate in the center of the semitransparent lid. On the backside was a pattern painted in the form Luluo Haltina used. Apparently, it also serves as a proof of capture. Luluo resumed her explanation.

"For the name, it's called the "compass of desire". The concept that, when activated, shows the place I desired." (Translation Note: Pirate's of the Caribbean anyone? Drink up, my me hearties you ho!)

Hajime heard the explanation and his heart skipped a beat.

"The place I desired is shown." That means…

"It will lead you to the location to want to go. Anything, anywhere, be it hidden or – even in another world."

"……"

The "different world" Luluo is talking about will be the world by which the Mad Gods reside. The liberators must have used concept magic out of utmost will. To beat the gods, of course.

Therefore, this compass was produced to find the place where god was. Hajime was certain Oscar helped make this compass using the concept magic as well as his generation magic.

But – it should also be possible to use this compass to show them how to return to Japan.

A means to return home was found… delight welled in Hajime's chest like he might burst. Yue clenched his hand and gave him a firm squeeze, looking up at him gently.

"To get all the god's magic, if that is your goal, you'll be able to travel anywhere. I wish you to move forward with free will and find happiness in your life. Good luck for your future."

Luluo had come to the end of her words after giving her speech, all that was left was the tree with the entangled lithograph.

They remained immersed in the afterglow in silence as if chewing on the events that just happened to their satisfaction. Only the sound of the rustling of leaves as the wind blew gently affected their vicinity.

It was Hajime that broke the stillness, asking Yue with a monotonous tone of controlled emotion. “Yue, just to hear it, using the magic of sublimation, combined with spatial magic. Can we cross to another world?”

Startled movements spread across Kouki’s group behind him.

Yue understood the weight of those words and the exploration of that potential. And with the strongest magic user with the knowledge of the god’s inscribed in her mind, she searched for a solution.

As result, she obtained the answer…

“…. I’m sorry.”

“Really…”

Just that. If the world can be exceeded simply by mixing spatial magic with sublimation, then certainly the liberators wouldn’t have had so much trouble, too.

Luluo has said that there were three concept magics that had been produced. The first concept was given to the “compass of desire”. It would stand to reason that the other concepts would be the concept to go to another world and the concept to overthrow the gods.

In other words, when not attaining to concept magic, the idea of leaving the world is difficult.

Yue was hanging her head dejectedly at being unable to meet Hajime’s expectations. Hajime gave her a kind smile and combed his fingers quietly through her beautiful gold hair. Yue seemed ticklish, looking upward at Hajime and shrugging her shoulders as he ran his fingers over her skin.

“It’s no problem. I was being greedy. It was just a thought. We just need more god-level magic. We just need to get the right one, and you’ll definitely be able to figure it out, so don’t have such a face.”

The heart that was impatient at the thought they might be able to return had already recovered its poise, and Hajime shrugs his shoulders with the expressions he had to spare. In answer to whether Yue was relieved at his recovery, like usual she snuggled close to him.

“Cough, Cough. Well… is Yue and Hajime back to normal? I think a shortcut formed for us to return to entrance. So less lovey dovey for now!”

Shia, while looking at Yue and Hajime, interrupted their pink space while saying “Yes, as always”, certainly in one corner of the garden the magic circle appeared. As Shia suggested that would be the shortcut to descend back to the ground level.

After checking the magic circle, Hajime strokes Shia’s bunny ears to correct some of her sulkiness. Then Kouki starts to speak up.

“Oh… hey, Nagumo. A short while ago when… you received the concept magic…”

“Yeah… we should be able to return now. At least, this compass will tell me where to head next.”

“Really…”

Kouki wore an expression as if hope was lost. Ryuutaro, Shizuku, and Suzu also wore feelings that looked ready to explode, like they might start crying at any second. They were hesitating over the lack of getting the god-level magic, but only because Hajime was there for the moment. It seemed like they would have to depend on Hajime.

“The, a, as for that, Nagumo. When returning…”

Suzu tries to ask Hajime about something.

Even if she didn’t say it, it was possible to guess. They remembered Hajime’s indifference to his classmates. That they might only be able to return if Hajime does it for them… Reserve goes out when perfect salvation depends on the benevolence of another being straight through.

Suzu, as the typical mood manufacturer, was either in a good place or a bad place as she tried to talk and stir around the subject of returning home. The thought was they could return naturally too, but… that was groundless, and… Well, Hajime didn’t hate this kind of thing.

“Be relieved. There won’t be any capacity restrictions or demerits. I’ll return everyone if I can.”

“It is, taken along or… eehehe. Thank you, Nagumo-san.”

“For the fact that you had so little confidence. You didn’t really do anything, did you?”

“Ugh!”

Kouki, Ryuutaro, and Suzu hang their heads to their chests.

With just sublimation magic, the ability of every magic can be raised a bit. Of course, when you already had god-level magic, the necessity to sublimate it would look more like a limit breakthrough without the side effects, so there would also be some restrictions. Like Rebirth without the side effects or something like that.

Still, they seemed unconfident. It should be said that they couldn’t get sublimation magic. But also that it could be expected. It was that the tests were flawed and exploitable that they made it to the end in the first place.

But as such, Kouki and the others hanged their heads. Still, one person tried to follow awkwardly with the circumstances.

“Yaegashi… you seem to be able to use the new magic?” Hajime asked.

“!… Oh, I think that, I can use it, yes.”

“Ho! Is that true?”

“That was really it? You’ve learned it?”

“Indeed, Shizu, Shizu! Suzu’s Bride!”

This also could be expected. Shizuku had been through the pleasure hell, a dream of the ideal world, and having her feelings reversed all without help. Even if her battle ability wasn’t enough, the god-level magic was worth getting just from the mental power she had to fight through.

It was heartwarming, but it seemed like Suzu was the only one who appreciated that fact purely. Ryuutaro wore a mortified expression while Kouki wore ominous shadows in his expressions while he praised with a smiling face.

Shizuku watched Kouki with an anxious look at that.

“Anyway, back to Fair Bergen again. Slowly. Hordes of cockroaches was light trauma. Serious mental damage. Yue needs to heal with spirit.”

“Kufufufu. I’ll fix you right up.”

“I, I too! I’ll put my head on your lap, too! Yue’s already done enough! I’m on top of this!”

“It’s because everything is done! Because everything is done! I say it twice because it’s important!”

“The tired master should step on mistress! It’ll be good. I make the mistress chair replacement so you can relax. Do you have a firm foothold separately? You may stamp as much as you like?”

As Hajime walked to the magic circle while cuddling with Yue, Shia and the rest crowd around him from left, right, and behind.

Hajime wrapped a hand around Shia’s arm while giving a little laugh. Shia gives a start, but seems happy and grasps back. Kaori and Tio think Shia is given priority somehow and turn to look at her with envious eyes.

Shizuku follows behind watching the view with a bright expression while considering the possibility of going home.

One boy wore a smile and chose to understand it that way at least, and thus the capture of one of the seven great labyrinths, the Sea of Trees, was complete.

Chapter 133 – Shizuku’s Confusion

The depths of the forest of Fair Bergen felt particularly peaceful and calming that morning.

The twitter of a nearby bird stirred in the air like a ripple across the water’s surface. It seemed to be a gentle music, floating along with the tone of rustling leaves.

However, in a particularly unremarkable part of Fair Bergen out of public eye, there sounded a different kind of noise.

Hugh! Hugh! Hugh!

“Up! Hah! Oh! “

It was sharp sound of air splitting combined with short breaths. With each sound, a black line cut through the air, splitting the morning fog. The black sword moved naturally through the air like flowing water.

The sword wielder’s movements were extremely refined, and when combined with her flowing black hair, resembled a dance dedicated to the gods.

The black sword and black hair moved near the path of a falling leaf, arcing in a circular pattern. The leaf fell within the sword's path and was immediately dispersed, beads of sweat scattering into the mist.

For how many hours did she dance with the earth? The ground was carved with her footprints, and there were an immeasurable number of destroyed leaves at her feet.

However, her blurred form moved tirelessly, fighting against her own exhaustion. Her form was innocent, yet beautiful to behold, each strike with the sword performed in earnest.

"—hah."

Shizuku's eternal blade dance suddenly met disorder. Her sword missed the leaf by a quarter of an inch. The centrifugal force of her spin caused her to lose her balance.

Shizuku barely managed to avoid tumbling. With a bitter face, she put the black sword to her side.

"Hah, hah, well…"

Shizuku shook her head in irritation. Her trademark raven-black ponytail whipped left to right, echoing her sentiment.

"Clear your mind, clear as water."

Taking a deep breath, she remembered to put her mind at peace and to calm her heart. It was an exercise she had learned in Japan while she practiced fencing. Shizuku's troubled heart regained its tranquility quickly.

However, the figure of a boy emerged from that calmness…

"Nuaaa!!!"

While gallantly shouting in an unladylike manner, she swung her black sword as if to beat away at the image in her mind.

"Different, different! That is why! It's different!"

The waters of her mind were turbulent, not a single sense of calm anywhere. Like a typhoon ravaging the sea, Shizuku's mind rampaged.

"This is all different, and I don't know the meaning. I'm calm, I'm cool."

By all odds, she was far from calm. Her heart seemed to scream at her incoherently.

In fact, she had spent the entire day trying to calm herself, but her sword wouldn't listen, the state of her mind shown in its choppy movements and her negligent footwork.

She was trying to shake off the disturbance in her heart with discipline and training.

Why, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say Shizuku spent all night focusing on that.

Yesterday, Hajime and the rest had returned from the Haltina Great Labyrinth and chose to rest immediately. Shizuku got a meal and a bath before immediately going to bed, of course. However, she

couldn't sleep for some reason, her mind turbid. Though it was midnight, she left her bed, the black sword in hand.

And it was that boy who kept rising to the surface of her mind, causing her to suffer the mental anguish when idle.

"Sie! Sie! See!!!"

Her shout got rougher after each strike.

It was the unpleasant events of the large labyrinth that she couldn't avoid thinking about.

It had started after they were brought into that world of dreams. When Shizuku remembered the sweet world, it caused her to blush, but it was also painful… Her ideal world… was something she could never tell anyone.

She tried to reject the inner maiden within her heart.

"Uryaaa!!!"

This caused her to think about the final trial of the great labyrinth. The unexpected content of her reversed feelings. It wasn't the fact that she had felt love for the black creatures. No, it was her extreme dislike for a certain boy… she didn't have the urge to kill him, but her thoughts were certainly hateful.

That is…

"It's different. Friendship. It's friendship Bonzai!"

She lost her composure with the sword. It seemed to stem from the collapse of her character. The black sword swung in vain, the wind switching around crudely. Shizuku grimaced in displeasure as the shadow of that boy floated in her vision like a phantom, a hateful smile on his face. If one of her classmates saw this, they'd be shocked.

Shizuku continued to swing the sword recklessly, trying to bring back the peace and remove her confusion. To shake off and deny it. She wanted to convince herself that it was all a misunderstanding.

With fatigue setting in, Shizuku's feelings started to regain their original stillness. As to the cause of her turmoil, that was, of course, the nature of the Great Labyrinth, an eccentric environment that created a temporary loss of propriety. Her heart finally settled down, even if she thought about him. Back to normal.

"Fuaaa!"

She slowly expelled a breath. She closed her eyes and remained in the darkness, sweat dripping down her pale skin, an eloquent sight to the morning. With her body wet, hair sticking to her cheeks, hot breath coming from her lips, it can only be described as slightly sexy.

As Shizuku indulged in the lingering calmness, a voice spoke up.

"As I'd expect from Shizuku."

"Ahh!?"

Shizuku's heart jumped through her throat at the sound of a familiar voice. The tone disturbed her peace. The thought "How is this expected?" came without anyone to tsukkomi. Shizuku glanced back at the voice with these turbulent thoughts in her mind.

The expected person, Hajime, stood there. She had not felt any sign of his approach from her training.

"Nagumo-kun. Don't scare me like that, it is poor tastes to stand behind me."

Shizuku gave a smile while her heart pounded and throbbed uncomfortably.

Confronting Hajime while he took her chastising…

"… Have… Pufu!"

"!!"

Her chastising was repeated but only received laughter. He could only react to her colorful criticism with humor. However, because her cheeks were dyed slightly, her statement had very little weight.

That awareness is like a splinter hurled at her consciousness.

"And you… you…"

Hajime, still slightly laughing at her remark, gives an apology and tossed her a towel from his treasure warehouse. Realizing that she was covered in sweat, she began to wipe herself with a surge of panic and a strange sense of embarrassment.

"I wasn't looking to disturb you. I just woke up early. I was looking for a suitable place to train and came across Yaegashi. I wanted to see how you're doing. Are you doing well?"

"I am… I just couldn't get any sleep."

"Well, you did conquer your first large labyrinth. I suppose you're still excited?"

"Oh, well…"

It was certainly exciting in a different way, and there was an increase in strength. However, Shizuku couldn't say it and averted her eyes.

The suspicious act caused Hajime to narrow his eyes and tilt his head with a puzzled look.

Shizuku ended up losing more of her composure.

She looked restless, uncomfortable, fidgety…

"… Yaegashi, have you been feeling any strangeness, any aftereffects?"

"Oh? You could say I'm fine. Yes, completely healthy! Rather, in the best condition."

"If you say so… but you look very tired, and you're acting suspiciously."

"Suspicious behavior? Coming from you? I am ordinary! You're the one who is standing behind people thoughtlessly!"

"You're usually cool as ice (TN: he refers to her as a hitman)… always calm…"

Though Shizuku was obviously not normal, she insisted she was, so Hajime decided to stop worrying about it. He put on that kind of look before approaching Shizuku.

Shizuku suddenly panicked at Hajime's sudden approach. She pushed both hands out in front to put up a barrier between the two of them.

"What? Why are you coming towards me? Please wait a moment. Sweaty! Territory Violation! Calm down! Do you want the towel? But it's all… Not good. I'll return it once it's washed! So please stop!"

"… Something is definitely wrong… I only want to see your black sword."

As Hajime approached her, the attitude Shizuku presented while stepping backward was that as if she was being approached by a pervert.

"Oh? My Black sword? Something like that…"

"I can reinforce it. It's something I figured out thanks to the sublimation magic. If you'd rather I didn't, that's fine…"

"You can… If you do, I'm thankful."

Shizuku timidly showed him the edge of her black sword. It seemed he didn't intend to get any closer.

Shizuku was acting more and more suspicious to Hajime, but he supposed she didn't want to get close to someone after sweating so much, so he gave a shrug.

Hajime grabbed the black sword and stamped his foot. Instantly, the ground rose into the form of a chair and table. He sat down in the chair and pulled various ores out of the treasure warehouse while displaying the black sword in front of him. (Translation Note: The summary says he pulled them from his storage, but the MTL made it seem like he transmogrified it from the ground, that was his thing for quite a while, after all.)

While watching this, Shizuku took the chair opposite of Hajime's while wearing a gloomy and restless expression.

"….."

"….."

There was no conversation. As Hajime fiddled with the ore, only the sounds of small birds chirping and the whispers of leaves could be heard, and the morning peace and calm returned.

However, Shizuku did not feel particularly uncomfortable. Although there was some tension between her and Hajime initially, the silence did well to help her regain her peace of mind.

Hajime doesn't spare Shizuku a single glance, deep in concentration. Hajime's pupils take on a serious expression, brightened by red magic. As Hajime's hands moved, crimson magical light altered the composition of the minerals themselves.

Shizuku's thoughts were like "as expected, it's beautiful" as she watched Hajime's face while he worked. She started to doze off, her head falling to her shoulder and elbows. After staying up all night, drowsiness was the consequence.

In the middle of the work, Hajime took her hand and extracted a drop of blood. The act startled Shizuku and almost caused her to fall from her chair.

As the moments passed on, Shizuku began to fall into a sense of strange comfort, her eyes once again growing heavy. Then Hajime's voice spoke up.

"Look, it's done, Yaegashi."

"…."

"Yaegashi?"

"…."

"You're asleep?"

Her arm functioned as a pillow for her head. Hajime squinted at her face, observing that her eyes were closed. He looked in amazement at the defenseless expression she wore as she slept.

Normally, one would wake them up gently, or perhaps put a jacket over them. Hajime instead shoved magic power into the sword and presses it against Shizuku, activating one of its functions.

"Baribaribaribaribaribari." (electric shock)

"Abababababababa." (sound of someone being electrocuted)

Sparks gushed out the blade. Shizuku made a scream, stiffening up and springing to her feet in an instant. Hajime had activated the fireman's standard thunder, which was certainly one way to wake you up.

As soon as the black sword was pushed away, her head thumped face first into the table, white smoke rising from her body as she rubbed her jaw with one hand.

The black sword seemed to have worked satisfactorily.

"Why'd you do that so suddenly?"

Naturally, the recovering Shizuku roared in anger. She hit the table with her hand and gave Hajime a scowl.

"I figured I could wake you up and test the weapon's efficiency at the same time."

"You say that without a single reservation, this guy…"

As Shizuku tried to throw our words of protest, she realized that she had tossed the sword away while being shocked. She raced over to recover it.

"Before obtaining the sublimation magic, the best I could do was add one or two abilities to ore. However, by tying the magic with the generation magic, I was able to create two or more effects."

"And you're ignoring my anger to explain… Alright… It's fine now."

Since Hajime began explaining the reinforcement of the black sword as if nothing happened, Shizuku decided to let it go with a grand sigh. She watched him with scornful eyes, trying to convince herself to do so.

“Therefore, I added some new magic to the black sword. One is gravity magic. The weight of the sword can be changed. You can pull and repel against the blade and even cut gravity itself for an instant.”

“That… is amazing.”

The scorn in Shizuku’s eyes dissipated during Hajime’s explanation, instead of opening wide as she glanced over the black sword. However, it might have been too early to be surprised. As Hajime’s explanation continues, her face starts to tighten over the full abilities of the sword.

First, it is possible to rupture space itself using spatial magic.

The black sword can repair itself automatically with reproduction magic. Moreover, it may aid in the recovery of the user to boot.

It can also damage the spirit by penetrating the body with spirit magic.

As well, fireman’s standard thunder and wind nail’s performances were improved, plus the new ability shock conversion.

“…..”

Furthermore, the authentication method and status of the plate was reworked so that a long intonation is no longer necessary for a high effect. The sword itself has a “movement state” allowing the spells to be used chantlessly. Because Yaegashi is a speed fighter, she wouldn’t able to spend long periods intoning a skill.

Hajime finished his explanation. Shizuku watches the black sword in her hand, cold sweat running down her face. The original cheat sword she possessed has now become flat out bugged, no matter how you look at it. If its performance was known, wars would be fought to acquire this weapon. It is currently the strongest sword in this world.

“Is it alright… having such a thing…”

“Oh, it’s just in case.”

“Just in case?”

Shizuku tilted her neck to the side with a puzzled look as Hajime looked up at the sky and gave a small nod.

Hajime had a sharp look, like from the eyes of a keen wolf. Shizuku’s heart started to beat rapidly. However, she waited for Hajime’s explanation while ignoring the heat rising in her cheeks.

“It’s pretty understandable. Once we capture the last labyrinth that means we should be able to return to Japan. However, there will be obstacles. The idea that it’ll go that smoothly is just optimism.”

“Obstacles? You mean like the mad gods?”

“Yes. It doesn’t seem like the god’s will let an irregularity like me go. I’ll need some meat for the time when the God’s Apostles like Nointo start to appear in large quantities… though you’ve also considered the age of gods magic as a war potential.”

“Didn’t you say something early about needing a meat wall? Hey? You said that didn’t you?”

Hajime carelessly leaked a bit of his real intention, and Shizuku tried to address it with a floating vein throbbing. However, Hajime kept on talking, disregarding it.

“My artifact making ability as transcended into a new evolution thanks to the sublimation magic. Even if it doesn’t improve any of the other age of god’s magic, a considerable improvement in combat potential is possible. I can improve all of your equipment. Not only Yaegashi but the rest of the party too. While we go to the ice and snow labyrinth, it’s possible another apostle of god may attack. It must be repulsed by any means. Of course, you’ll also be able to challenge the other labyrinths with those strengthened arms.”

“I understand what you mean…”

Having said what he wanted to say, Hajime stood up. Shizuku wore a troubled expression and hesitated.

“… After all, Nagumo-kun’s group will go without us?”

“Hmm? Do you want to come with?”

“…..”

Shizuku didn’t answer. Originally, this was a big favor they asked and Hajime kept to his side of the bargain. He was to help them capture one large labyrinth.

The struggle through the large labyrinth, it seemed to permeate through their flesh and bones. She couldn’t deny the ability shortage that she possessed. In a word, even if she followed, she’d be a burden for Hajime and the others.

Furthermore, once capturing the ice and snow labyrinth, returning might become available. So Hajime had no reason to bring the other classmates along.

That’s why Shizuku didn’t answer, instead of shaking her head. Hajime opened his mouth at Shizuku’s response, then shrugged.

“Well… if it’s only Yaegashi, I wouldn’t mind bringing you…” (TN: Of course, wouldn’t want to leave some of your harem behind.)

“Eh?”
Shizuki’s eyes widen in surprise at the unexpected words that leaked from Hajime.

A beat later, Shizuku turned her head, her cheeks blushed red like a furnace as she hurried to conceal it. While desperately trying to calm down her wild heart, she attempted to ask Hajime’s real intention.

“As for that, what…”

“Well, it’s strategy. Your spiritual strength won’t be a problem at all. The gaps in skill can be filled with an artifact.”

“Oh, yes. Is that true?”

Her expectations were easily betrayed. Shizuku still thought “I did not expect it!”

Shizuku looked back, pulling the heat from her cheeks and quieting her mind while giving Hajime a reproachful look.

However, the words immediately after caused the blush to return once again.

“Yes, that’s true. Apart from the other members of my party, Yaegashi is the person I trust in most.”

“!!!”

It seemed like Shizuku’s reproachful look was a result of her thinking Hajime was trying to flatter her, but Hajime misunderstood. It was a recantation because of that. But the correction tugged at Shizuku, and she began to blush again.

Hajime wore a wry smile, ignoring Shizuku’s reaction while concentrating on his original purpose.

“Although, well, even if only Yaegashi follows, that could be trouble.”

“Eh… why is that?”

“Well, what will others in the class say? Amanogawa will definitely be out of control without you. He’d run around recklessly or just go missing going “Yaegashi is in trouble!” Embarrassing people are troublesome.”

“You’re being too frank…”

Shizuku was getting tired of being thrown around by Hajime’s behavior. Hajime reached into the treasure storage and pulled out a several chakrams.

“Do the chakram metastasize internally? What are you doing, taking them out?”

“It’s training. Just like you were doing before I came. If you’re tired, you should head back. You should be able to get some sleep now.”

As Hajime said it, Shizuku remembered how tired she really was now.

However, it didn’t seem easy to leave this place either. Looking at the surroundings… and Hajime, who had created a column of thirty or more Chakram around his body. Noticing it caused Shizuku’s mouth to drop.

“… May I watch… a little?”

“I don’t mind, but are you sure you don’t need sleep?”

“It’s alright, I’ll return when I get tired enough.”

Hajime shrugged his shoulder, acknowledging Shizuku’s words. Shutting his eyes, he pulled out Donner. Shizuku rested her elbows on the table, her cheeks in her hands, watching Hajime while supporting her head.

The next moment:

Tantantantantantantantan.

Hajime pulled the trigger on Donner, aiming at the chakram flying around at high speeds fast enough to be difficult to see. The bullets were non-fatal rubber-coated metal, causing the gun to produce a sound different than the usually explosive sound effects.

The fired bullets enter straight, right, and left in their respective chakrum circles, dashing from another chakram before returning to Hakime. The bullet exchanged so as not to put out from the column made from the chakrams metastasizing into more chakrams. His finger continued to pull the triggers as he peeled off and dashed around the circle of charkram aiming at yet another chakram.

It was repeated, minimum movement and eagle-eyed shots emerging across the dancing leaves in every direction.

The movements might have lacked the elegance of Shizuku a little while before, but there was no military art in the last few hundred years that succeeded by being beautiful. However, it was reasonable. The movement was refined for minimum requirements combined with rational decisions. It was a different sort of elegance compared to Shizuku.

It was creating a storm in which Hajime flew within its center, causing Shizuku to stare instinctively.

A bright red ripple expanded in the air from where Hajime worked, in addition, more chakrams were taken from the warehouse, creating a spheroid surrounding from every direction.

And,

Dopan. Dopan. Dopan. Dopan. Dopan. Dopan.

The sphere flashed with bright red as the chakram moved in.

The fatal bullets accelerated by electromagnets, delimiting from the laser-like red line in the glow. Ten meters in diameter, the chakram circle gradually narrowed the range. When it reaches 3 meters, red flashing light discharged continuously from point blank range.

Hajime shot down each light one at a time. Donner in his right and left hand embodied the moving about offense and defense like a separate living entity. The innumerable chakram basked in bright red light, filling the inside of the sphere. The shots and shining increase, like a bright red moon that floated in the sky.

"… Beautiful."

With an entranced expression, Shizuku muttered the words every time she saw the bright red around Hajime. It seemed like her unconscious real feelings were overflowing.

The shots echoed across the forest, spoiling the peace and calm of the morning. However, Shizuku's eyelids continued to become heavy while watching the red star in the sky, and consciousness quietly slipped away from her.

Chapter 134 – Awakening

"Nu….Nu?"

Shizuku's eyes opened softly while she leaked out a cute noise. Waking up from her nap, her pupils couldn't seem to focus quite right. A moment, later, she realized that she was looking at the wood grain of a ceiling over her head. In her half-wakeful state, she also recognized a soft feeling on the back of her head.

As she wore such a defenseless face, a familiar voice came from her side.

"Shizuku-chan, are you waking up? It's already noon time."

"Uh?….Kaori…?"

Shizuku unintentionally turned towards the source of the voice. It was indeed her best friend next to her. Kaori was watching Shizuku with a gentle smile, sitting in a chair next to the outdoor window.

She rubbed her eyes and sat up, shaking off sleep like she was rising to the surface from a deep pool of water. She started to recall where she was before she lost consciousness and tilted her head to the side.

"Oh? I was outside in the woods… I mean… how did I get here, this is Kaori's room?"

This was one of the private rooms prepared for Hajime's group in Fair Bergen. Although she didn't know Kaori's room on sight, since Kaori was here, she assumed it was.

Remembering the event this morning, Kaori wore a bitter smile with just a hint of pain in her heart while examining Shizuku, who wore a puzzled look.

"Yes, it is my room. This morning, Hajime brought Shizuku-chan. You were staying up all night? That's not good. You just came back from a Great Labyrinth. You should be taking it easy."

"I understand, I'm sorry. So he brought me here? I don't remember at all."

"Shizuku-chan was very tired."

Kaori raises an accusing finger at Shizuku as a form of scolding, causing Shizuku to fidget restlessly. Her docility made her look even more cool and adult-like with her long black hair no longer in a ponytail, displaying the gap power between the two of them.

Her unclothed figure in a one piece shirt also contributed to the appearance. No wonder all the girls in the class wanted to call her older sister. Witnessing her figure would cause someone to declare that 'her destructive power is amazing!' With a single smile, she could create a blood bath from nosebleeds alone.

Even Kaori was blushing a little. Shizuku looked up at her with a blush of her own and asked Kaori nervously.

"Oh… how did he?"

Shizuku seemed to struggle with the fact that she had succumbed to sleep, her heart rate going up at the thought of Hajime holding her. Was it perhaps a princess carry?

However, reality was cruel, so Kaori's cheeks were cramped.

"How would you be carried normally?

"…Kaori, normally?"

"Normally, yes, plain. Only a little artistic."

"Wait, Kaori… what do you mean by artistic?"

Shizuku continued to ask even as Kaori hesitated to say anything disagreeable. Kaori's eyes seemed to swim for a while, before she forced a smile back onto her face.

"You were sleeping, how do you say?… crucified to a cross… while being drifted through the sky?"

"Eh, crucified?

After hearing it in detail, it seemed the Hajime had used the opportunity to bring Shizuku back to her room as a form of training, practicing with gravity stones to bring her back without waking her. It could be said that getting the balance right in order to prevent her from being jarred awake would be a burden worthy of being trained.

In addition, she ended up in Kaori's room because Hajime had no clue where hers was.

"Even so… why a cross?"

"It spreads the body out like a sphere, so that mistakes won't jar the body as much, so it's easier to make adjustments, so you sleep."

"Even if you say that… isn't that a sort of unpleasant sleep…"

Shizuku's cheeks twitch convulsively. A vein floats over her forehead, the heat in her chest turning ice cold. Kaori deepens her wry smile.

By the way, the state of Shizuku's crucifixion was witness by a group of passing soldiers. Like the image of Christ on the cross hanging in churches on the earth, it had an effect on people. The number of Shizuku fans increased exponentially due to the mystique of that image, but that was better left unsaid right now.

As Shizuku burned in silent anger, there was a sound from down below. It appeared to be the voice of someone familiar. It was the voice of a woman. Kaori glances out the window.

"It's somewhat noisy? What's going on?"

"…there's an encounter… Shia and Arutena (Translation Note: Yeah, I didn't remember her either. She was an elf saved by Hajime after being enslaved by the Hoelscher Empire). A fight this early in the morning. Something ought to be done."

"What kind of fight?"

"Well, I'm not sure how to explain it, something quarrel-like? It's early, let's go see!"

Without understanding, Kaori sums up and explains the event while urging Shizuku to follow her downstairs.

Apparently, the pair had started fighting regarding something to do with Hajime. After some unheard comment, Shia had exploded and the pair started wrestling. Shia was currently using a cobra twist on Arutena in the middle of a dining area.

Shia seemed to be using professional wrestling techniques on the granddaughter of Alfrerick. She was practically a princess! An estranged girl from the rejected rabbit group was using violence on the daughter of one of the strongest forces in Fair Bergen. In a normal situation, this would be an immediate reason for execution.

However, the rabbit family had changed their luck of recent.

In other words, they were now known as the “head-hunting” rabbit family.

Solving the situation with her skill, Shia spit out vicious words about Arutena daring to keep approaching Hajime, and so she met Arutena crudely and with violence, causing her to crumble. Shia was aware of Arutena’s behavior. Though no one would have expected the treasured princess to approach Hajime in the first place, but still…

“Oraoraoraoraora! If you want me to stop, don’t make eyes at my Hajime!”

“Ah, ah, ah! This is shameful!”

Apparently, Arutena did not seem too discouraged from continuing to follow Hajime, even at the hands of Shia’s wrestling techniques.

Arutena was tossed upside down and put on Shia’s shoulder. Professional wrestling technique – kinniku buster! Expanding her splendid legline to the max, Shia lifted Arutena inversely, exposing her groin area. Her undergarments were made bare, defiling her purity and innocence unexpectedly.

By the way, Hajime was still in the dining room. There were also several employees of the dining area and two skiki maids with Arutena. Everyone was flustered except for Hajime.

“Ko… is this okay? That’s the princess… being treated this way.”

“Is she really the princess? Would she wear such an expression?”

“…Ah… that… Somehow, she seems happy?”

Shizuku asked the question after heading down from the room she had stayed overnight, while Kaori’s expression twitched at the sight in front of her. Kaori made it a response by pointing to Arutena’s face.

Her face was certainly dyed red, but the edges of her eyes seemed to be shining with excitement. Arutena’s expression almost seemed to give out a happy atmosphere.

Though the other party was giving her extreme humiliation… it still seemed like she was following her heart and it was not all together bad.

“You’re going to be obstinate, how about this!”

“Ko…this time, such disgrace.”

Shia had run out of pity as Arutena refused to say she'd stop approaching Hajime. Even before the kinniku buster throw had brought her to the ground, as Arutena fell, Shia kicked out her foot, rolling and bringing her body up. It was the so-called Romero Special.

While rolling, Arituna's skirt flies up, ruining the grandeur and her once graceful tone. However, her expression still wore a determined look, which invalidated Shia's persuasive power.

Because Shia's position, she wasn't able to see the expression on Arutena's face. Therefore, she believed that Arutena was sufficiently punished. Everyone in the place was already mind boggled that Arutena wore a pleased expression. "This daughter… she's already been beaten up but is still pleased?" This put a perplexed expression on everyone's face.

"I see, something quarrel-like indeed."

"Yes… you'd like to think even… Tio found a like-minded friend, but this seems a little different."

Shizuku wore a face of agreement, while Kaori saw something pitiable. In fact, Tio, an oddity in and of herself, seemed to be watching Arutena with affection, like a master watching over the growth of her pupil. Her look seemed to hold sympathy and joy over finding a compatriot. Hajime and Yue sat down in a seat opposite of hers, while holding looks of disgust.

Tired of this scene, Hajime opened his mouth toward Shia and offered words that damaged Arutena to the very limit.

"Shia, stop wasting your time on nothing."

"Say, Hajime, I won't stop. I'm just reducing the number of rivals. The princess decided to refuse. She also seemed a little too conscious of her wants. I took the initiative to strike first!"

Shia shifted into a reverse boston crab, apparently intending to nip this rival in the bud. While putting her into another shameful place, Arutena lets out a painful, but somewhat glad, scream. The appearance of a princess was completely lost. The maids and employees tried to escape reality, their souls hanging out of their mouths, ready to escape.

Hajime turned his eyes on Tio with a flat expression, and then he dipped some bread into his vegetable soup and put it into his mouth before standing up with a reluctant sigh.

While collecting the glances of everyone in the dining room, he moved over to Shia and pulled her arm and Arutena's foot, separating the two.

The drawn Shia immediately settles into Hajime's arms. Kaori and Shizuku meet the scene with blank expressions while letting out a stupid "oh!" noise.

Hajime disregarded them. And quietly whispered something into Shia's rabbit ears, causing her eyes to widen in bewilderment.

"Shia, Is Yue your rival?"

"What?" Yue? That's not right. Yue is special…that."

While embracing the puzzled Shia especially strongly, Hajime tried to persuade Shia.

“There already is no rival to you. At least, I don’t intend to talk to other women at the same level I talk to Shia. It’s impossible to compare Arutena and Shia together. I give you my priority, my special treatment.”

“Ha… Hajime…”

To the word “special” that Hajime unexpectedly whispered, Shia dyed red momentarily. It wasn’t exactly what Hajime said, but the conviction behind the words that showed Hajime’s change in attitude since some nights ago.

In other words, Yue was “special” from everyone else. No one could be in the same line as her, but there isn’t only one special person for Hajime, not only Yue can be special.

To be told this, with no special situation, in the middle of a dining room at noon was a complete surprise. While wearing an embarrassed expression, Shia’s blush deepened. Everyone else except Yue had stiffened with similar leers as Hajime comforted Shia.

“That, Shia. With regard to Arutena, Do you think that applies to you?”

“What? Eh? I?”

Shia responded with confusion as her back was patted softly.

Arutena had covered her face with both hands, embarrassed by the pink space she suddenly found herself right next to. However, she’s peeking out from an opening in her fingers, her eyes trembling restlessly with just a hint of shame.

“After all, I clawing… after all, it’s Hajime.”

“Chi, it’s different! I don’t think of Shia badly. But I want to talk to Shia without reserve!!!”

“Oh…”

Shia pulls away from Arutena, then goes back to clinging to Hajime. Such a thing is a professional wrestling skill, obviously. Shia realized she had turned Arutena abnormal unintentionally as she applied a shameful joint technique.

Tio was giving Arutena a look of admiration. Shia noticed, it was indeed a smile of approval.

A new abnormal had been awakened. Shia turned her gaze to Arutena, while floating a disturbed expression.

“Another transformation…”

“This is different! Shia misunderstands! I really just want to get along well with Shia!”

“You do? What? Me?”

Shia was asking nervously as Arutena vented her emotions.

According to Arutena, apparently, this.

Arutena is a princess in Fair Bergen. Since she's the granddaughter of Alfrerick, a high level person in the community, she is treated as a noble existence between the families. Therefore, she's always been handled carefully by others.

The result goes without saying. Brought up as a gentle girl with a kind heart, she received a good education and was loved by many, however, she was always given special treatment. She was given first priority, practically worshiped by boys and girls of the same age. There was nothing on equal terms with anyone.

Surrounded by people who'd always treat her gently, she began to feel lonely. She began to feel admiration. She always wanted a close friend, someone who could exchange opinions without restraint.

However, it was the obstinacy and result of the rivalry with Shia, that impacted Arutena the most. It was an impact to her body as well as an impact to her mind. A girl the same age as her treated Arutena mercilessly. It exposed those feelings with ever hit, physical and by word. After the shock, she absent mindedly and unintentionally felt joy.

And, so she thought, someone from the same age group, it might be possible… to become best friends with someone who can put the nature of her family aside. It seemed wonderful.

"Because, I'm ashamed to say, that when I got near Hajime, Shia would pay attention to me."

"Well, you can't get attention like you're a dog…"

"There it is… handled as a dog…me"

"Oh… you react with just that?"

To Arutena, there is blush on her cheeks from a strange gladness for being treated like a dog. Shia wears an "After all…" expression. Arutena sits up, panicking a bit, stretching her hand out to Shia quietly while standing up nervously.

"So, then, if you say so, will you be my friend? Can you answer me?"

"…Somehow, this confession makes me itch… if you just want to be friends, I can't think of a reason to refuse."

Shia was disgusted a bit while thinking "it's still a princess". She took Arutena's hand for a handshake, and Arutena wore an amazed expression. Arutena's look turned to a smile, pleased at the unexpected development. Meanwhile, everyone else wore stiff and uncomfortable expressions.

"?"

When Shia tries to separate her hand, "Huh?", she inclines her neck. Why won't Arutena let go of her hand?

"Uh, Arutena-san? My hand…"

"Oh, please drop the honorifics, just call me Arutena! And I'll call you Shia! Since we are best friends, this is normal!" (Translation note: I'm really bad about catching honorifics, so just assume most people are using –san -sama ect…"

They went from becoming friends to best friends in five seconds. Really? This is the daughter of a large figure in Fair Bergen, after all. Shia began to have a cold sweat, while Arutena blushed at telling Shia as much.

“So, Shia, what technique will you use this time?”

“Eh?”

“It is very shameful, and strange pain even becomes numb… however Shia’s warmth is transmitted. Because I’m Shia’s best friend, you can use your various techniques on me. We can play more!”

At that moment, Shia shook off Arutena’s hand with a zuzazaza- and retreated back to a wall, cold sweat flowing down her face.

“Na… What best friends? Isn’t this just a pervert, you really did change!”

“Such a thing! I only want to spend as much time as I can with Shia before she leaves tomorrow!”

“Then, what comes with “wanting to play”!”

To this dangerous Arutena, Shia’s rabbit ears were bristling. Hajime held a smiling expression, and Shia had her mouth gaped.

“Indeed, this is my Shia, who shares the hardship of others.”

“The first half of your words are wonderful, but I other half sound unpleasant!”

To a comparatively cruel excuse of experiencing hardship of a locked-on abnormality (Arutena), Shia became watery eyed. Apparently, Hajime doesn’t intend to help at all.

Arutena approached Shia who is pressed up against the wall. She’s wore a smile that said “Let’s continue with what we started a while ago.”

Being the opposite of pleased and suppressed by this power, Shia turned and opened a window with a “ban” sound, leaping from the room with a jump and running away like an escaping rabbit. She apparently planned to escape from public until things cooled down.

“Ah? Shia! Where did you go? Wait for me!”

To Shia’s actions, Arutena acted like a woman whose lover just deserted her, leaping through the window while executing a physical strength on par with what Shia did. She started running off with a “shitatatata” sound on her feet. Shia turned back and saw Arutena. Giving a shout, “Hiii!?”, she bolted off toward the downtown of Fair Bergen.

The two disappeared from sight with surprising swiftness. Everyone was left staring at the scene, Hajime at the head, with feelings that could only be described as stupefied.

Meanwhile, the form of a girl advanced on Hajime.

“….Hajime… A while ago, what did you mean by what you said to Shia?” Kaori demanded.

Problems just always seemed to outbreak around Hajime.

Chapter 135 – Unexpected Future

After the clear affection that Hajime showed Shia, Kaori approached him with a strange sway in her step.

"….Hajime….What was that a little while ago? I wonder?

An impossible shadow floated across her face, with no discernable light source as the cause. Just her eyes darkened. Combined with her chilly look, it had a terrible effect.

"Though it hurts to think about… Did Shia really become someone "special" too? When? Why? What caused this?"

To Kaori's interrogation, Hajime gave a wry smile while scratching his cheek.

"Well, what to say… Although I can't say it's within the same line as Yue… somehow or other, I have started to desire an exclusive possession for Shia. There was Yue's advice too, and so I decided to treat Shia in suitable manner. There was nothing in particular that changed."

"So, it's… romantic feelings for Shia?"

"I'm not sure… It feels different. But I think you can call it love?"

Actually, Hajime could not help by incline his neck as if asking whether these feelings for Shia were in fact romantic.

To Yue, his heart throbbed, and he felt passion that flew in the face of reason, which wasn't the same with Shia. Besides the burning feelings for Yue, he felt a quieter, softer one when it came to Shia. Once putting it into words, he realized it might really be love.

He'd always have feelings that burned like the sun for the always quiet Yue, however, the sweet and innocent Shia was like the moon. It was a very mysterious thought. They were contrasting feelings, but it was clearly more than simple affection. However, since the feelings were subtle, Hajime was at a loss on how to explain.

The entire dining room quieted as Hajime's feelings were expressed. Shizuku wore a complicated expression, while Yue and Tio wore slightly gentle-looks while they continued to eat sweet cake, and as for Kaori, who had started this cross-examination…

"… Yes, I understand."

She wore a content face, a happy smile forming for some reason.

Even if Yue's position didn't change, this was proof that there was still room in Hajime's heart. That smile was for an important friend who managed to accomplish this. Though finding out had disturbed her and still pressed in unconsciously, she understood that the distance between Hajime could be crossed and smiled as a result.

Of course, she felt envy. There were smoldering feelings, even at this very moment. However, she had fully realized the situation based on the journey so far. If there was time to do such a thing, it was good sense to show yourself in a favorable light.

As Kaori moves through her vivid feelings, she figured half of Hajime's feelings were a result of Shia's natural virtues. Kaori really liked Shia's strength and diligence. She could be happy for a friend.

Somehow, those feelings were picked up, causing Hajime to show an embarrassed look before he reached out and rubbed her cheeks muni-style.

"Fe? Ha… Hajime?"

"It's not really a big deal."

"Eh? What is it?"

Kaori, who became glad for some reason, asked with a smile, not understanding.

However, Hajime didn't answer. While having an expression as if he was giving up silently, he went full muni of Kaori's cheeks. (Translation edit: Doesn't he know you never go full Muni!) Then she turns her eyes to Yue.

Yue had seen the rising affection for Shia in Hajime's eyes, and she wore a small smile while giving her nod of approval.

Tearing off a piece of bread, she gave Hajime a mysterious smile before dipping it into her soup and then tossing it had Kaori like a brick.

Becha! The bread stuck to Kaori's temple with a sodden sound, clinging to her temple. It quickly transmitted the implication, "It has been decided and you have no involvement." Kaori wore a cramped cheek, pulling off the bread while wearing a dark smile before performing leaping attack at Yue.

"Yu-e!"

"… Stop. Wasted Effort. Just tuck your tail and go home."

Yue avoided Kaori's strike by escaping through the window Shia had jumped through. Looking back over her shoulder, she gave a grin. It held the feeling like "Try catching something outside of your reach."

That "uuuu!" Raising a vexed voice, Kaori chases after. Her silver wings unfolded and she took to the sky. Is their relationship good or bad…? At least Yue seemed to like the interaction with Kaori.

The people left behind stared on in an absent-minded state.

"Hmmm, finally, master has surrendered to Shia, too. In that case, the time in which he falls for mistress and Kaori's charm grows ever closer."

Tio drawed up her unnatural chest, the brutal double hills protruding with a Bachikon! The sound seemed to have an effect on the room. Amorousness overflowed from her body, in particular, the remaining men suddenly become more slouchy.

However, that sex appeal was let loose on Hajime specifically.

"Putting aside Kaori, you have no chance."

"Haa… haaa… so intense… from master… breaking my hopes… piercing adequately, mistresses' weakness… haa… haaa!!"

Her body started shaking from Hajime's word, her thighs fidgeting as she hugged herself. The sensual atmosphere this gave was incomparable to the sex appeal from moments before.

However, the slouching appearance of the men from earlier withered quickly. This was because of the unpleasant look on Tio's face. This killed the mood. (Translation Note: Yes, I find freaky hot girls in the throes of ecstasy to be a real turn off… oh to be in light novel-land!)

Shizuku caught Hajime's strange remark, which seemed to casually suggest that Kaori was in the same category as Shia.

(Then as for me… Hey, what do I have to do with any of this! Kaori seems to be taken good care of. That is enough and, yes, there is nothing else to conclude!)

Standing in a corner of the room, Shizuku's face scrunches up in one comical face after another. Everyone else is focused on Tio. A few gave Hajime brooding or evil expressions. Hajime gave another sigh. Meanwhile, the chases continued on outside.

For noon time in Fair Bergen, it was very noisy compared to the usual tranquility.

"Uu, I encountered such cruel eyes…"

It sounded from a forest corner of Fair Bergen, the complaint shining with the orange of the evening sun.

In a plaza set off a little way in the town, many tables had been set. There was a fountain using spring water in the center. Usually a place for people to rest, none of the residents were out right now, concerned with other matters. Only Hajime and Shia remained there. All the other members were gone, making preparations for travel.

Hajime sat down at one of the tables in the deserted open space, giving Shia a nod in acceptance of her hard work and training. The cause, of course, was the attack from Arutena. Shia had been chased to exhaustion by someone who used animal-like perception rather than physical strength, likely only stopped by her grandfather's intervention.

As Hajime watched her drooping rabbit ears, he couldn't help but burst into laughter. Those ears started to twitch violently.

"Please don't enjoy it. It was seriously scary!"

"Don't say that. It's great to find a friend your age. Isn't it good you got to play fully?"

"I can't lie to you, but can you really call that playing, or that kind of relationship friends? I think I understand what Hajime is going through with Tio now, huh? How should I say… being liked doesn't feel bad, but it's exhausting?"

The fatigue caused Shia to droop once again.

Hajime felt sympathy for Shia, giving her a node. He understood better than anyone how the goodwill he provided toward Tio was not the extent of a mere transformation. Tio's desire to not be defeated by Shia and Yue was strong. Therefore, Hajime felt tired, a regrettable reality of his true feelings.

Hajime's expression softly turned into a smile, and he lifted up a hand quietly. He gave Shia a kind pat, soothing her rabbit ears. As Hajime fawned over one of her ears, Shia trembled offering her other ear.

He had both wonderful rabbit ears wrapped up in his hand, his cheeks blooming. The sweet sound of him stroking her ears with his fingers leaked out, the sweetness transmitting into the neighboring air and wrapping Shia and Hajime up in a sweet space.

Hiding her face in her blueish white hair, she speaks in a whispered voice.

"… Hajime… The… thing is, that, it's daytime… that…"

The voice was fraught with expectation that can't hide shamefulness. It was obvious what she wanted to say. She just wanted to be clear.

Hajime rose from his seat with a noise and moved next to Shia, where he sat down. Shia noticed the sign and twitched while turning her face down, her body still shaken. She was pursued by Hajime gently, who turned Shia's shoulders towards him. He held her powerfully just like that.

Shia's face, held by Hajime, boiled up completely red. Her pupils, full of light, were moistened. The maiden's eyes were too pretty, looking up at Hajime, overflowing with affection.

“…. Shia, it was you who said “The future isn’t absolute,” certainly it’s like that.”

“Ah….”

“It was the thing Shia had said to Hajime long ago when she wanted to travel with them. A once-in-a-lifetime confession, words of answer that Shia long since believed were impossible. Absolutely, these words of determination turned to Hajime.

“Shia… now, you haven’t confirmed your feelings.”

There was still Yue who was “special”. Is she really even good enough to hear such a thing? Shia was afraid of confirming.

“I love Shia very much… I do not want to lose her to anybody.”

Even though the words were selfish, his desire leaked from them. Shia’s eyes increased in heat, she let out a hot breath like a dragon.

“There is not chance I want to let you go, so please decide. Shia is my woman!”

“…. Yes…. Yes… I am Hajime’s woman!”

While tears fell down her cheeks and her body lips tightened, she wore a smile. It was a blooming, energetic, full smile. No, a smile that was many times more beautiful and lovelier than anything preceding it. Surely, if other men saw Shia today, their hearts would race and their blood pressure would rise just by this look.

In it, Hajime was no exception. The love within him spiked and he hugged Shia tightly, taking her lips against his own.

“Nu…. mmmm…”

At Hajime’s beckon, rejoicing tears fell from Shia. Her body lightened like cotton candy, a sweet sigh leaking from her. Her body burst with heat like the Guryuen Labyrinth as if she’d start melting at any moment.

“…. Ah…. Hajime…”

A silver bridge hung from their parting lips separated with only a breath. The embarrassed Shia lowers her eyes. Her usual cheerfulness is overridden by a terrific loveliness. It was a charm that could hold a man captive in a way that matched even Yue’s mysterious beauty.

Shia’s pink lips opened slightly, her tongue moving with a chirochrio (abundance?). Her pupils give him an upward glance. A look that said… “more”.

Hajime smiled, looking at the lovely pleading Shia. His lips met hers again as his hand touched her cheek.

At that point, an impatient voice suddenly spoke up.

“Fuhya, to start doing that that… those two… and outside!”

“Shh! Suzu, you’re being too loud!”

“Shizuku-chan is being too kind when it comes to Hajime.”

“…. Everyone is being too noisy, you’ll embarrass Shia.”

To those familiar voices, Shia separated her lips with a gasped and turned her gaze to those who were talking.

Shia, becoming aware of the group, lost the mood. “Wait, oh, that!” as a people fell from the corner of the flower bed where the plaza was enclosed.

Falling on top of each other, Kouki, Ryuutaro, Suzu, Shizuku, and Kaori were there. Yue let out a sigh, appearing from behind. Tio appeared as well, floating an interesting smile. Apparently, they had all been hiding to watch the love affair between Shia from cover.

While getting up in a hurry, the group blushed. Suzu and Shizuku didn’t seem to be able to look directly at Shia and Hajime.

“To see, see… and everyone, how long have you been there….”

Shia was shaking, her face turning deep red like an explosion. The one who answer the question directed at Suzu turned out to be Hajime.

“It was since I was playing with Shia’s ears.”

“That’s not the beginning, everyone saw… yet you still say it like that…”

Shia hit Hajime repeatedly out of a sense of shame. Tears form in her eyes, but they had different meaning from a moment ago.

“Why do you want to hide it? It was good timing, and I didn’t want to miss the chance.”

“I did not want to miss it either… but even so…”

Shia’s spirit was dampened by Hajime’s blankly nice manner, further causing her to feel embarrassed, yet also happy.

As usual, Tio speaks up while floating a smile at such a Shia.

“Please, how was it? How was the taste of passion from master? Nn? Tell this mistress a little, how is Shia’s happy embarrassment?”

“Speak for yourself, pervert.”

Tio had put her arm around Shia and then suddenly she collapsed from a strike to the back of the head. Her finger twitched, moving into a point, and it was drawn to… “So it was Yue”. Yue had chucked a lump of ice mercilessly at her head unexpectedly.

“Yue…”

“…. Shia.”

Shia had glanced back at Yue, who was giving Tio a cold look as Tio pointed at her. After Yue dismissed Tio, she gave Shia a patient look. And then she smiled lightly, both of her hands opening.

"… Come."

"…. Yue, now."

Shia jumped into Yue's chest. She clinged to Yue, with the size of a child but the stability of a woman. Yue patted her head with a look of kind affection while she hugged Shia in turn.

"… Yue, I… finally!"

"Nn… you worked hard. Good child.

"I love Yue, much the same!"

Shia echoed and then wept for joy. Shia was understood. However much Hajime thought someone to be important, it was ultimately up to Yue, whom was "just as himself". Without worrying about Hajime, anyone else would be an "other" to Yue.

Yue treated Shia like a younger sister. She, the older sister, had watched her younger sister working hard. Moreover, the feelings of Hajime, which were stubborn, were finally accepted. It was a joyous event that Yue accepted sincerely, the value of Shia, and her right to her feelings…

"Is Yue not bothered?"

Unintentionally, Hajime muttered with a sullen face as Shia happily pressed her face against Yue's breast. The younger sister who depends too much is reluctant. Like a good older sister does not baby, both people wore an expression of contentment that looked heartwarming overall.

"Tio, next will be our turns, let's work hard."

"Of course, I dream of the day that I am attacked by husband and worked hard."

"… you can't act like… Tio."

Tio was in the state of collapsing while Kaori was talking while poking her. Tio revived with her eyes shining with hope. In the surroundings, Koaki, and Ryuutaro were looking at each other awkwardly, while Suzu looked at Shia and Hajime with an unreadable expression.

Do they need to encourage each other? Hajime opened a mouth with a troubled smile after hearing Kaori's words.

"Please don't tempt me so much…"

"!!" X2

Kaori and Tio look at Hajime with surprise, their eyes shining like stars. There was no other meaning to that… their dropped confidence recovering quickly.

Hajime had no intention to accept a partner who Yue didn't like at all, but he couldn't think Yue would value people that she constantly fought with. Of course, now that Shia has been accepted, there already is someone "besides Yue", and the declining complaint of their being only one isn't in common use.

The main points is that Hajime has recognized two people as important. To the degree which forgets itself when there are others.

Though Shia doesn't have a monopoly on his desire, it was still declared that Hajime accepted Shia and had a place in his heart. This meant things were not helpless for the others.

And at that time, Yue wore a pleased expression, Kaori and Tio's eyes were sparkly while Suzu watched on nervously. Everyone's eyes seemed to meet restlessly.

Hajime opened his mouth without knowing what was going through Suzu's mind, suppressing Kaori and Tio.

"And? What are a couple of peeping toms doing together? You're a bit early for supper. So what is your business?"

"Well, that… we met Yue accidently, and we…"

Shizuku gives a perplexed expression to Suzu. It seems like Suzu had noticed something unusual regarding Hajime. They seemed to have joined Yue accidently when she was looking for Hajime.

Hajime shot Suzu a dubious look. Suzu stepped forward toward such a Hajime.

"Nagumo-san, You see, take Suzu to the next large labyrinth, please!"

Because he thought Kouki would be the one making that kind of request, he was surprised when it was Suzu that was the first to beg.

"Suzu, that…"

"Kouki, this is about me. Therefore, this is an individual request for Suzu. Please don't butt in!"

After Suzu returned from the labyrinth, Kouki possessed a gloomy atmosphere in response to her words, but with no strength to retaliate, he stopped. So it was not everyone, but Suzu specifically.

"Even if you don't accompany, I'll help bring us back to Japan anyway, and I said I can provide strengthening artifacts so that you can become strong, is that okay?"

"Yes, it is certainly so…, but, as for Nagumo, you won't lend a hand to Eri?"

"… Is it Nakamura…? Well, it is so. It's possible I'd shoot her on sight on instinct. She is one of the reasons Kaori was killed."

Suzu floats an embarrassed smile towards Hajime's bitter expression.

"It is so, However, I want to meet her and talk. Therefore, I need power. So I want to challenge the large labyrinth again. And no matter how the result becomes, when you come out, you'll probably end up in the territory of the demons."

"Suzu, that is…"

Shizuku grabbed Suzu's shoulders instinctively. No true friend would allow another to go into the demon territory alone.

However, Suzu was overcome with her strength of will, and there wasn't a single doubt in the look she gave to Shizuku as she held her shoulders.

On the other hand, she was convinced that if she traveled with Hajime, she'd have the chance to persuade Eri. If she accompanied Hajime to the source of the ice and snow labyrinth, they'd end up in the so-called demon king castle, which seems to be where Eri was held up.

Anyway, the ice and snow labyrinth is east of the south continent. The country Garland, the stronghold of the demons, was in the central southern continent.

Suzu knew that it was impossible for Hajime to be concerned about Eri, therefore Suzu understand it and knew Hajime might not wait for Eri to come around before leaving. Therefore, she'd talk to Eri until Hajime found out how they could return, and the best way to get that chance was by accompanying them to the ice and snow labyrinth.

When Suzu turned her eyes back to Hajime from Shizuku, she asked earnestly with a tone that suggested desperation.

"And if, if it's possible to collect Eri with that, if Eri wants forgiveness… in that case can you return us to Japan together. Please! Please, I beg you!"

"……"

Suzu's screaming plea echoed, no one could say anything and everyone was silent.

Honestly, for Hajime, he remembered the look on Eri's face. The spectacle when Kaori fell was recalled at this moment, and only murderous intent sprang with thoughts of Eri.

It was selfish that Suzu did things this way regarding Eri. However, the thought of cooperating felt like a small bone stuck in his throat. The girl named Eri Nakamura was already an enemy to Hajime.

However, even if it's so, the request of Suzu was done with all of her heart. It was the eyes of the ascribable Kaori as to why Hajime possessed so much urge to kill Eri. Those eyes said something, conveying their own thoughts and meanings.

At that time, the long silent Kouki opened his mouth.

"Nagumo, I must also ask. I am the cause of what happened to Eri. Even though it might be unpleasant, I must speak with Eri. I can't let Suzu go along to the demon territory. In it…"

Kouki had to strongly bit his lip, his fist grasped giving words with a slightly depressed atmosphere.

"As it is, it is not possible to end. Shizuku was also able to obtain the age of gods magic. I, uh… if we keep following, we'll surely obtain power. If it is not such a mean place full of mental attacks, even I should be able to capture it. A large labyrinth where it goes this time, is a place even those demons can capture. Then, surely I can!"

"Kouki…"

To the appearance of Kouki, with his clapped trembling fist and dark atmosphere, Shizuku watched him with anxious eyes. Shizuku remembered the look of shock on Kouki when she was able to obtain the age of gods magic and he was not. Therefore, though he took care not to let it show, to a childhood friend he could not conceal his uneasiness.

“Oh certainly, I can’t let Suzu go alone. When it came to Eri, given Nagumo’s character, I have to ask too.”

“Ryuutaro too, Haa, well, it doesn’t fit to let Suzu go alone. Nagumo-san… whether it is possible to ask…”

It didn’t really matter if it was Kouki or Suzu, if a companion was going, Ryuutaro would cheerfully come too. Though her eyebrows were lowered to the character of eight from embarrassed towards such a Ryuutaro, Shizuku smiled like she was welcomed by Kouki now. Next, Shizuku bowed, seeming to apologize to Hajime.

Hajime turned his eyes to Suzu with a desperate look to the decision of Shizuku, nearly brought to tears. Kouki who had some returned feeling, Ryuutaro who was a muscle brain, Kouki and Kaori who worried about Shizuku, who worried about Suzu as a childhood friend, and finally he threw back a loud sigh.

And, Yue, and Shia, and Tio’s eyes, and they had opened their mouths and were nodding as if to say they understood the unpleasantness of having to make this request.

“… If I get even a little of hostility, I’ll shoot to kill…”

“Of course, Nagumo-san, thank you!”

Suzu, who managed to get consent, looked wiped out, her face bright with the expression of thanks. Shizuku also expressed thanks.

Because he’d need to invent concept magic that would prevent a re-summon in addition to the magic that would allow them to return to their world in the first place, Hajime was thinking that it would take a while to return anyway, even after getting the last piece of magic.

Whatever Suzu did would not be an obstacle for his return, so he didn’t think there was any reason to not accept. However, the thought of Eri reforming and returning, Hajime did not think it was possible, and if she did get in his way, he would shoot her to death seriously.

Eventually, Hajime should take Suzu to the last large labyrinth and decided to permit it as it did not give him any problems in particular. With his own magic rising thanks to sublimation magic, it shouldn’t create any problems.

Ignoring Suzu, who had a new sense of purpose, and the sweet feelings that came with it. Hajime smiled to himself. Yue and the other nestled close to such a Hajime.

“… Nn, a magnanimous Hajime is cute.”

“Indeed, this is a Hajime to be proud of.”

“After all, master is tsundere.”

“Getting… hehe, thank you, Hajime.”

From each, warmly treating Hajime, he glanced away. And Yue and the others laughed happily to see it.

This place of gods and demons was interesting, but it seemed like they were reaching the final stretch.

Chapter 136 – Shunee Snowfield

Gliding across the clouds and glistening in the sunlight, the airship Ferner could be seen unopposed in the sky.

“As far as the eye can see it’s an ocean of clouds.” Shia muttered while looking outside the window of the bridge.

“…. the Shunee (Schnee) snowfield is always covered in an overcast sky. The outside is frigid.” Yue explained while nodding.

The Shunee snowfield and Risen Large Canyon divided the south continent in half. On the eastern side sat the heavy snow field, which was covered in cloudy weather throughout the year, so even during periods when it doesn’t snow, the earth remains smothered in snow and ice.

East of the Sea of Trees caught between the demon country of Garland and the southern continent is this mysterious place. Strangely, neither the Sea of Trees nor the country of Garland are touched by snow or ice, as if the boundary was cut with an impassible wall.

The interior of the snowfield houses a considerably large gorge, likely formed from the ice and the snow. The last of the large labyrinths should be at the tip of the gorge, the Shunee Snow Cave. Normally, an adventurer would be worn down by the cold on their way towards reaching the tip, making it a perfect location for the labyrinth.

Hajime had known of the snow cave’s location ever since his conversation with Miredi. Make no mistake, he understood it was a great labyrinth. However, a super convenient tool named airship allowed him to skim over the clouds in relative comfort.

“Master, is the compass working properly?” Tio asked.

Hajime was holding a compass the size of his palm in one hand.

He had received it from Luluo Haltina, a compass designed with concept magic to show him “the place he desired”. In which case, it was pointed straight for the Shunee cave with pinpoint accuracy.

“Ah. It’s okay. This is wonderful. The needle doesn’t just face in the direction I want, I also get a sense of the exact location and distance as well, somehow.”

“Is that so? So it seems to understand where the place is specifically. It must be hard to describe how that works.”

Kaori agreed with Hajime’s words of admiration. When they were in Fair Bergen, he tried an experiment by marking specific coordinates using the compass. The exact geo-location was determined in some complicated way. The power of this concept magic was shocking; he rejoiced that he could even feel the existence of his hometown in Japan.

Of course, the coordinates vanished as the power demands increased exponentially. The consumption of magic increased proportionally to the distance of what you’re looking for. To locate a coordinate on Earth, all of Hajime’s power was used in one go. Fortunately, he barely avoided fainting by supplementing his power just before it dried up.

Shia returned from the window, approaching the sofa where Hajime was sitting. To Hajime's right, Yue always clung. The left side was the place that Shia had originally sat. So she abandoned the window and hopped over, a perplexed look on her face.

As Hajime watched her suspiciously from the side, Shia appeared nervous and fidgety. She seemed to feel nervous now that Hajime had formally begun to treat her as his lover, becoming more embarrassed at unreservedly clinging to him.

Hajime's expression softened at the appearance of the beautiful figure of Shia, grabbing her hand and pulling her to sit next to himself.

"Ah…"

"Don't be embarrassed now, we've already been seen."

"… Shia is cute."

Hajime laughed as Shia wore an amazed expression, meanwhile Yue warmly spoke while having narrowed eyes. Though Kaori was giving an envious look, she also noded in agreement at Yue's words.

Tio gave a perverted smile while moving to sit across from Shia on another sofa.

"Kuku… certainly Shia has become cuter. So how was your first night? Was it painful… or did it feel good? Why don't you let us know? Hora… hora… let us know…"

"What are you saying? It's impossible to answer!"

"What is it? So Master's performance was so poor you can't say? Yes?"

"That isn't true! Instead it was amazing… many times… wait, what are you getting me to say!"

As Shia was suggesting, during their last night in Fair Bergen, Shia and Hajime has spent the night together. Yue had prevented any peeping toms, including a certain Sea of Trees princess she needed to spank, which left the princes writhing in ecstasy on the ground.

Shia covered her face with her hands, hiding her shame. It seemed to have various meanings after her impactful first night. It was an inevitability, as you could say Hajime was a warrior with a long military service. Needless to say, it was Yue who turned him into the super soldier he was today.

While licking her lips, Yue gave a bewitching smile that suggested that with "three of them" the erotic vampire princess would be "included next time", her eyes showing her worldly desires. While holding Shia, he glanced over at the companion he had turned, and gave Tio a demonic flick on the forehead.

Pow! It hit with a terrific sound, and everyone continued to ignore Tio as she writhed on the floor wearing an expression of ecstasy.

"It'd be good if we could finish the great labyrinths. I want to meet up with Myuu again soon."

To avoid the embarrassing mood, Shia changed the subject while wearing a bright expression and laughing in desperation, but Hajime quickly moved things back on target.

“In addition, we should make time for Kam (TN: Her father).”

“Hajime…”

Hajime gently patted Shia’s head, his eyes wrought with worry. Shia shook her head with a soft smile to reassure him.

As a matter of fact, Hajime had offered to take Kam with them when he left for Earth shortly after they had fought the empire, but received a curt reply. As he had predicted, Kam and rest of them had answered no, determined to protect the name of the Haulia tribe and fight until the bitter end.

It was decided then that Shia would separate from her family. Hajime gave a sigh. He was unable to refute Kam, who gave a happy smile while saying “It’s enough if you keep Shia happy”, which showed his resolve as a father. It may end up being possible to come and go between worlds; however, they did not yet know the limits of the concept magic, and it was also possible that the mad gods may interfere, making it extremely difficult. Moreover, he wanted to spend his last days in this world with family.

Shia sympathized with his feelings, showing him a bright smile.

“I’ve said my goodbyes to father, and although it breaks my heart, I’m happy, and I’ll be even more happy in the future.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes! Fufu… I realized this when I saw you with Myuu, you’re overprotective when it comes to family, you know.”

Shia gave an amused laugh under her breath, matching Yue’s bright look while mischievously embracing Hajime’s arm.

“… Nn, we mustn’t depend on Hajime’s kindness too much.”

“Ahaha, certainly, it won’t be good if we depend too much on Hajime.”

To Kaori, who wore a sulky expression while looking around uncomfortably, Hajime could say nothing as he came off more like a womanizer.

The side door opened, and Kouki’s group entered. Kouki and the rest had been training using the artifacts Hajime had provided them, and it seemed like they were taking a break. They took seats in another sofa, while ignoring Tio, whom had a swollen forehead and a gross look on her face.

“So, how are the artifacts, are you getting used to them?”

“Ah, it’s surprising. The output has been doubled, the added benefits will be very useful.”

To Hajime’s question, Kouki wore a complicated expression while patting the holy sword sitting at his waist, acknowledging the increase in strength.

“While being able to walk through the air is odd, it’s seriously amazing. It will be really useful once we get used to it, not even mentioning the ability to increase and decrease weight.”

“Suzu also is extremely pleased with it. It seems far easier to use now. Thank you, Hajime-kun!”

“I also have no problems. If anything, I’m afraid it’s too strong. However, we won’t know anything until we’ve managed to get some actual combat experience.”

Everyone seemed to be satisfied with the modified artifacts that Hajime had prepared. They all had a suitable fighting spirit for tackling the last dungeon, especially for Suzu, whose eagerness to meet Eri once again was shown.

“That’s good. Your fighting strength should increase by several times if you can master your new skills, make every effort before you find yourself being pressed in the demon territory.”

Though Hajime gave off a curt attitude, the power he had given them was the real thing. With him helping Suzu reach her objectives, Suzu and the rest of the party’s opinion on Hajime was that of a “Tsundere”, but they didn’t say anything because he was still a little scary.

At this time, Hajime’s gaze unexpectedly snapped forward towards his target. The mood shifted from relaxed to serious.

“… Did we arrive?” Yue asked.

“Ah, it’s time to descend.”

At Hajime’s command, Ferner rushed into the sea of clouds, and everyone’s gaze turned serious as they looked out of the windows.

After only a few seconds of descending through white clouds, Ferner was instantly enveloped with a snow storm cold enough to freeze the hull in an instant.

“That’s certainly severely cold, as you said, that is not this mistress’ forte.”

Tio grumbled while trembling and staring at the silvery landscape enveloped with blizzard with an unpleased eye.

“Everyone, hold on to the artifact I’m handing you, it will help protect you against the cold which will help greatly in surviving this labyrinth.”

“… Nn, anything Hajime handmade, wonderful.”

“That’s true, the part with the snow crystal motif is beautiful.”

“This is my third present from Hajime… ehehe.”

“… Master, why just a tiny snowman? Although it’s cute by itself, I was hoping for an accessory with a more elaborate design.”

Each pendant artifact that Hajime handed out offered protection from the cold. There were a snow crystal motif made from a translucent light blue stone embedded in an elaborate design that seemed to absorb the light.

Only Tio received a pendant which had a snowman on it, wearing an American-like smile with cheerful features. She gave a wistful expression as she compared her pendant to everyone else’s.

“When you do something about your inclinations, I’ll present you with something better.”

“Is that to say this lowly mistress… is not worth a womanly present…? It’s too cruel, Master. The gap, the unpleasantness is too painful. Please give this mistress a nicer present!”

“… so it’s decided that you won’t fix your behavior…?”

Suzu and Shizaku give each other a look of amazement as Tio embraced Hajime while wearing a look as if she’s about to cry.

“… Shizu, Shizu, aren’t these just rocks? In that case, wouldn’t a snowman be much better?”

“Suzu, please don’t point out such a difference in treatment, because it’s too sad…”

“Is that so? If it’s effective, what’s the problem?”

“… Ryuutaro, I don’t think that’s what it’s about.”

In Shizuku’s hand was nothing but a common rock you could pick up anywhere, apart from its ability to protect against the cold. The dejected Suzu and Shizuku had slumped shoulders after comparing their pendants to the ones the other girls had received. For once, Kouki was actually able to read the mood, unlike normal. (TN: In other words, Hajime gave Shia, Yue, and Kaori beautiful gems, gave Tio an unromantic snowman, and gave Shizuku and Suzu a rock, lol.)

In the meantime, Ferner reached the Gorge of Ice and Snow, where the entrance to the ice and snow cave likely lead to the great labyrinth.

While operating Ferner, Hajime navigated the forge using far sight, and while it normally would have taken a while to locate it, with the help of Ferner that time was cut significantly. However, upon reaching the end of the gorge, the cave entrance was yet to be seen.

“… Nn? Does it end here? The compass says it’s still further ahead.”

“… Hajime, look.”

“At what?”

Yue pointed at the crystal display that showed the surroundings, activating a zoom function. Hajime looked at where she indicated, finding that the width of the gorge apparently narrowed up ahead. The ice and snow had piled up, creating a huge domed passage, leading towards the inside.

“There is no other way. It’s about a kilometer until the cave. Looks like we’re walking from here.”

“This is the first time I’ve seen the snow, it looks like it might be fun.”

Out of everyone who began moving at Hajime’s orders, only Shia appeared to be excited. She was like a child on a train who climbs onto their seat to look outside as they pass by the silvery landscape.

Though this was similar to the time that Shia had first seen the ocean, how Hajime looked at her was different. A Shia with her rabbit ears waving about extravagantly as she frolicked around with a child-like innocence was far too adorable. He seemed to want to hug her tightly, and it was necessary for him to hold himself back.

While scratching his head, hajimei concentrated on guiding Ferner into the depths of the ravine which was quickly becoming too narrow to land properly.

Hajime opened the lower hatch on the outside… and was immediately attacked by large swaths of snow coming up into his face. The artifact that protected against the cold did not provide any barrier, it only kept the person's temperature within a constant and suitable range. While trying not to become blinded, he hurriedly covered himself with a coat.

"Waa, is this snow? It's hard and fluffy!"

As such, Shia lone became excited. While her body was pummeled with the snow storm, she was busy stamping her feet and scooping it up without reservation, her eyes full of enjoyment.

"Oi, Shia. Let's go, you're getting too excited… Oi, are you listening?"

As Shia frolicked, she appeared to not hear the words of admonishment Hajime was giving her. Instead, she played in the pure-white snow that lay thickly about energetically while raising her voice.

"And she fell into an abyss, as it was…"

As Shia dives in the snow, the ground collapses under her while Hajime mutters something in a narrator's voice while turning scornful eyes to the newly formed massive crevasse that opens into a deep hole.

Shia had fallen into a crack in the earth while letting out a scream "Ahhh!!!" There was a fissure that ran along the gorge, but the accumulated snow had made it impossible to notice.

"Will you settle down before Shia dies? Hey! Shiaaaa!"

The dumbfounded Shizuku and Suzu began to fall into a panic while making pale faces. Meanwhile, Kouki and Ryuutaro were at a loss for words given the situation.

"Settle down, Shia won't be defeated by a fall like that. Besides, we need to get down there too."

Hajime waves it away like it was nothing and then jumped the 400 meters down into the crevasse after Shia without a moment's hesitation. Yue also jumped after them.

Everyone was provided with an artifact that provided the effect of aerodynamic, which provided them a method of reducing their rate of fall. Of course, Suzu could put up an energy-absorbing effect. There shouldn't be a problem for Kouki's group, although it went against common sense to leap off a cliff.

Suzu group peeked over the ravine quiet and watery eyed at the thought of jumping off the edge.

"What are you hesitating for? There is no time to hesitate! Aren't you making a better effort?"

Tio couldn't stand waiting behind them and thus gave a push in both the emotional and physical sense. With the feeling of being pushed like a bungee jumper without a rope, Suzu is forcefully pushed.

"Wait, I'll go, because I'll go – Suzu is a person who can do it if you do it, just let me go at my own pace!"

"The day grows darker as you say things like that. Look, come here."

"Yaa… wait, please don't life me. I'll do it myself, I'll go myselfffff…."

Tio lifted Suzu and then threw her like trash towards the bottom of the ravine. The scream thins as she falls down the ravine, her voice echoing magnificently.

Tio turns around and give Kouki a smile as he turns pale. That smile eloquently told them all, “Who dies next?”

“Yaegashi Shizuku. I’m off!”

Saying so as if trying to avoid being thrown, Shizuku leaps from the cliff with a beautiful form like a diver jumping into a pool.

Kouki and Ryuutaro let out a “Uoo!” and “Brave!” before passing Tio and jumping into the ravine with a shout.

“Umu, it’s good to be energetic, isn’t it?” Tio nods before jumping over the side herself.

_____

“Calm down, Suzu. Don’t cry!”

Barely contained tears echo across the gorge of ice and snow.

Suzu was shaking, and it seemed that her fall was only stopped desperately. Actually, the true reason she was crying was that she seemed to have wet herself a little, but that was something she couldn’t say.

Shizuku, Kouki, and Ryuutaro tried to comfort her, however, the three people had little strength left after their own experience bungee jumping without a rope.

“Suzu, it’s so soft… cute.”

“Please don’t do that to comfort yourself.”

Hajime tsukomi’d while giving Suzu, who seemed like a small animal under Kaori’s care, a look.

At that point, a dogon noise came from the corner of the wall near the bottom of the ravine where Hajime stood, followed by a shout “Uryaaa!!”

A part of the wall had collapsed with a roaring sound. There, Shia strolls out calmly with Doryukken propped on her shoulder.

“Iya… to be caught by such a cunning trapped, my innocence was played with! *cough*”

“Are you stupid? Though it’s not the great labyrinth, it’s still dangerous here, don’t forget it!”

“Ah… sorry… I got a little carried away…”

With a deceptive smile, Hajime rapped Shia on the head with his knuckles while scolding her. As she dropped her shoulders dejectedly, he grabs her cheek and gives a muni.

While punishing Shia’s cheek with one hand, he held the compass with the other. The compass indicated which road to follow from a branch up ahead.

“Come on guys, don’t stand around engrossed in your own world forever, let’s go.” Hajime shouted and Suzu seemed to regain her lost energy, nodding with renewed vigor.

Everything in the surrounding area was covered with ice and snow, and the water didn’t flow. Is everything frozen? Even with the snow storm in the valley above, the cold chill blew through, making a moderate temperature seem impossible.

If they didn’t have the artifacts to ward against the cold, just how much of their physical strength would be cut down. When the night falls, it could reach as low as -30, if not lower.

Lumps of ice and icicles that seemed to grow from the ground appeared more and more the farther they advanced. The wind also seemed to blow stronger, and the temperature continued to drop.

“This is a little troubling.” Tio wore a difficult expression and stood with some difficulty.

“It should be within 500 meters. It’s dangerous with the snow fluttering around and obstructing our views. Tio, can you please disperse the wind?”

“Understood.”

At Hajime’s request, Tio gathered her magic to avert the wind to the left and right. However, before she executed it, an objection was voiced.

“Wait, that, let Suzu do it!”

That’s right, Suzu.

With a fighting spirit, Suzu grasped onto two iron-ribbed fans that were the new artifacts Hajime had created.

The fans had been imbued with age of god magic much like the way Shizuku’s sword had been modified. Particularly, using the newly obtained sublimation magic, magic formations were carved into the iron-ribbed fan and evolved accordingly.

Though she had practiced on the deck of the Ferner, was it enough to use the fans properly? It had a magic absorbing function too. Using it while paying attention to the magic usage was a good idea to reduce the consumption of magic.

Tio gave Hajime a questioning look, and he gave a nod in acceptance.

“Yosh, then let’s do it! Sacred Shield!”

As soon as Suzu recited the magic’s name, a translucent barrier surrounded them with watery light. The barrier drew a curve loosely towards the front, generating a ripple of light that was beaten fast from the central portion of the outside.

The sacred shield was defensive magic, providing the ability to distribute energy of an object that comes into contact with it. One of the features of the fan was the ability to create the barrier without chanting. The strength of the shield was middle class for the sake of efficacy.

According to Suzu’s plan, when the snow and wind hit the barrier, the power is dispersed and thrown to the side, softening it to a gentle breeze.

"… Nn. It's not bad." Yue gave her impression after seeing Suzu's barrier.

The saint barrier was evolved magic from sublimation, seeming to the level where even a genius like Yue was willing to acknowledge it. Suzu smiled broadly from the compliment.

With the storm averted, their continued movement became much easier. As Hajime continued on, he suddenly halted, gazing forward with squinted eyes.

"… Is that it?"

When they followed Hajime's look, there was a crack with a beautiful isosceles triangle at the tip of the dead end. The needle of the compass pointed straight ahead. So this was the cave of ice and snow.

"It looks like we're here, but Hajime…"

"Ah, I get it, everyone prepare yourself. Something is coming!"

Shia's eyes lowered dangerously, while her rabbit ears danced around. She detected two or more signs of something in the darkness of the cave. While Yue, Kaori, and Tio remained relaxed as usual, tension ramped up with Kouki and the others.

Immediately…

"Ggigigigigigigi." X5

While giving a strange yell, a demon with a strange body came out of the cave, moving around fiercely.

With an appearance like a gorilla covered in white hair, it stood three meters high and walked on two legs, unlike a gorilla.

You could go so far as to say,

"Yeti? [TN: They call it big foot. Not the abominable snowman, or better yet, a Yeti. I'm changing it to Yeti.]

"As you would expect… in a parallel world, meeting UMA of a snow mountain in a place like this…"

Koari wore a stiff smile, while Hajime slipped Donner out while muttering, however, this time Shizuku stopped him.

"Nagumo-kun. Though it's bad, please let us take of this ourselves. Kouki… Ryuutaru. Suzu!"

"Yeah!"

"Good, let's do this!"

"We absolutely won't lose!"

Kouki and the rest rushed out ahead after taking Shizuku's order. They actually wanted to acquire actual combat experience using the new artifacts though Kaori seemed to want to help out.

Hajime, standing next to Yue, only shrugged, content watching them. Only Kaori came off as anxious, her hands grasped like she was praying.

“Wake up, Black Sword.”

In front of Hajime, Shizuku recited the invocation in a loud voice, drawing out the first attack.

“Tear it up, flying claws!”

The ability flying air claws was executed, and it approached the Yeti with a deathly invisible attack, however, the yeti seemed to move with animal intuition. They spread out like ninja’s, evading the attack completely.

However, Shizuku seemed to have assumed they’d dodge from the beginning.

“Suzu!”

“Understood, leave it to us!”

In a flash, Kouki and Suzu moved to intercept the return strike while the magic Suzu cast struck the earth under the nearest Yeti.

“Heavy barrier, Heavy Saint!”

The iron-ribbed fan turned with a glitter, a spheroidal barrier shining brightly around the earth under the Yeti. It was not a barrier to prevent the attack, but a barrier to confine the Yeti.

After being confined in a dome, it tried to break free by tearing at it with his claws.

At that point, a shadow appeared over Suzu, another Yeti came jumping, though Kaori had seen it coming and tried to yell a warning, Suzu’s magic had already been executed.

“Swallow barrier burst!”

A barrier extending one meter on all sides appeared overhead of Suzu, and the Yeti swung downward after, with a Gyari noise that was blocked by the barrier.

And, and that moment…

Dogoon!!

The barrier exploded magnificently with an effective roar. Without Suzu’s influence, the barrier maintained its directionality, the orange magic rippling as the scattered remains of the barrier split overhead.

The Yeti’s body is torn by the remains of the barrier as it breaks on impact. It’s somehow blown away nearly ten meters while shedding blood. Though it gave a bloodshot look burning with anger as it turns to Suzu, it waits more cautiously. No… more likely it is having trouble moving after the impact.

Anyway, because the left iron-ribbed fan was given an “impact conversion” aspect to its barrier formation, the Yeti was repelled. So to speak… it was an invocation known as barrier burst.

On the other side, the Yeti that was still caught in the heavy barrier had not received any damage, but was forced to the ground thanks to the heavy gravity magic, the doubled effect sealing off his movements.

Suzu was firmly suppressing two Yetis, gripping her iron fans with vigilance against the other advancing Yeti.

Shizuku took a roundabout path using high-speed movement from behind the Yeti. She accelerated the drawn sword, slipping it from the scabbard using the skill, drawn out. You couldn't even see the blade, only the black tracks flecking through the air.

"Giiii." {Tn: Isn't this the same noise the cockroaches make? Why does a Yeti sound like a cockroach?}

The speed was such that he was still left with a rough cut at his back, although the Yeti evaded, narrowly avoiding a mortal wound.

Innumerable icicles suddenly exploded from the ground surrounding Shizuku. Apparently the Yeti had a peculiar ice manipulation magic.

Though Shizuku evaded the icicles by jumping away, they dashed out from the ground and pursued her like missiles.

On the other hand, Shizuku chanted while crossing her black sword with its sheath.

"Meet Pulling Heaven!"

When the icicle splinters flew at Shizuku, they changed orbit to meet the blade and sheath of the black sword, as if they were attracted to a magnet, unable to reach Shizuku's body.

"Fly Heavenly separation!"

All of the icicles that came in succession to Shizuku unite in the air as they returned.

Pulling Heaven and Heavenly Separation used the practice of gravity magic to pull things apart.

The shot ended up returning to the Yeti who had casted it, but even with its movement dulled from the wound on its back, it managed to evade it, sliding its feet over the ice.

"… Somehow… that looks professional."

Shizuku mutters while she lands. As she stated, the Yeti was creating a road of ice as he slid, moving as he swung his arms forward in a bent posture resembling that of a speed skater. His velocity increased drastically.

The Yeti confronting Kouki were also sliding around the bottom of the ravine, using beautiful forms like that of skaters while creating ice as they went, probably making up for the dulled movements.

Three of the Yeti back away and little and form a row, even their arm moves synchronize completely as they approach with a sound that gives a forceful feeling.

"If they come from the front, it's only convenient."

Kouki comes up beside Shizuku. The light from his holy sword focusses and he gives a posture with a haughty attitude.

And,

“Take this, Soaring Heights!”

The deadly attack draws a shining curve, the release lead to an impact that scattered across the surroundings.

The deadly attack did not boast the full power. Even if the original power of the holy sword was enough to destroy the Yeti. The power doesn’t change even if Kouki shouts the technique. At that moment, the Yeti seemed to evade the attack in an unbelievable method.

“A triple axel?” Kouki leaks out a voice of disbelief.

Exactly as stated, the Yeti performed a triple axel in response to the deadly attack, avoiding a direct impact. The three Yeti united as a row only changed at that moment, jumping in a quite artistic and effective way.

The three yeti jump over Kouki’s strike while rotating… the attack missing by a fingernail, as their feet all landed in sync.

“!?”

“Uo!”

Shizuku and Kouki backed up some distance while preventing the flowing kick that followed.

“UraaaAA!!”

Ryuutaro approached from behind and struck out with his fist from the side, eliciting a shockwave. However, the Yeti bent backwards, sliding on the newly created ice. The appearance of sliding both feet resembled a move from the famous ice skater, Ina Bauer.

“Are you kidding me?”

“Calm down, Kouki!”

Kouki, who was determined to capture the Great Labyrinth this time, was gritting his teeth as he fought against the first enemy.

The Yeti approached from three sides while making unpredictable moves that Kouki just could gage, continuing their assault. What is the best maneuver they had, the eight-rotation triple? Moreover, their hands expanded greatly, a huge excavator seemed to approach from every side.

“Ha… flashing bloom!”

Letting out a sigh towards the Yeti’s triumphant looks as they rotated around them, her excellent kinetic vision say and expression that seemed unpleasant. She drew her sword while muttering an incantation at the same time she jumped overhead using aerodynamic and urging Kouki to follow.

The three Yeti land in the place where Shizuku was a second prior. Cutting down with their claws, they landed magnificently, but those that landed were just two of them.

“Gigii?”

The third was cut in two by the flashing bloom, an ability that cut space itself.

“Look Kouki, Ryuutaro, ignore their strange movement and just finish them off quickly, I’m going to Suzu.”

“Ah… damn, such an enemy suddenly…”

Kouki dashed out in a poor mood while throwing out abusive language in response to Shizuku’s words. Meanwhile, Ryuutaro became accustomed to the movements of the Yeti, and he too began to corner one.

Shizuku approaches Suzu, who is holding steady against a Yeti covered in wounds thanks to her manipulating barriers. The neck of a Yeti caught with Heavy barrier was cut momentarily.

Seeing that, Suzu releases the remainder of the Yeti from her barrier, and went looking for Kouki and Ryuutaro as they finished off the last two Yeti.

They wore refreshed expressions after having finally defeated the Yeti with a complete victory. Then they were greeted by Hajime wearing a strange smile.

“You know, guys, it might be interesting to take them to earth, we’d be famous for discovering the first ice skating Yeti!”

“You’re annoying, you joking demon… can’t we just leave them here?”

Kouki snaps. The first match finally came to an end by playing in earnest.

While Ryuutaro lets out a laugh and Kouki sighs, Hajime let’s out a shrug and turns away, stepping towards the cave. Shizuku told Kaori that “It was cool.” She gave a shameful gaze. Suzu send s Yue a look of expectation while being patted on the head with an “it was not bad” praise from an elder sister absent-mindedly. It seemed like the tiny girl who was like a dirty old man was secretly aiming at Yue.

“Well, then, let’s commence with the last Great Labyrinth.” Hajime’s words echoed across the gorge of ice and snow.

It was a line intended to focus everyone’s mind and forget about the ice-skating Yetis as they stepped into the last of the seven great labyrinths, the Ice and Snow Cave of Shunee Snowfield.

Chapter 137 – Snow and Ice Cave

The last of the seven great labyrinths, The Cave of Ice and Snow… was like a house of mirrors.

The passage inside this large labyrinth was a considerable area, large enough for ten people to stand side by side. The walls made from ice possessed the transparency of crystal. Thanks to the reflections you could easily become confused as to the number of people present. The end result… a mysterious internal structure.

Although another thing could be said to contribute to this mysterious feeling. Within the cave… snow was always falling. Naturally, since it’s a cave, it doesn’t fall from the sky. The snow is blown through the cave, moving along the wind. However, it wasn’t blown in from the entrance, but blown out from within the recesses of the cave.

In addition, it couldn’t be called normal snow.

“I-a… I did it again.”

“Ryuutaro… you were told not to go out of the range of the magical barrier!”

A piece of snow was sticking to Ryuutaro’s cheek, causing it to swell and become red. So, this snow possessed a temperature as low as dry ice, causing immediate frostbite if it touched you.

With the wind blowing against them, even though Suzu had dispersed the snow with her barrier, the distractions caused by the ice wall reflections resulted in people requiring treatments several times.

“A cave made of ice, with snow that causes frostbite, in a labyrinth named the Cave of Ice and Snow… I shudder to think what would happen without this artifact.”

“You wouldn’t have drinking water, that’s for sure.”

Shizuku muttered while taking out the small stone artifact that protected them from cold out of her pocket while Kaori agreed, splashing some water outside of the barrier. It froze as soon as it touched the air, making a bikibiki sound as it impacted into the wall. The flask would have already been frozen if they were entering normally.

“Certainly, though you could melt ice to make water, fire magic seems to be obstructed in this space, and would take considerable magic consumption to activate.”

“… But, that doesn’t apply to us.”

When Tio answered Kaori’s comment with a wry smile, Yue shook the pendant and ring at her chest while giving a shrug.

As Tio remarked, this Ice and Snow cave remarkably weakened the effect of fire magic. It would be a considerable hardship to use fire as a method to secure water by melting snow.

This didn’t apply to Hajime’s party thanks to the treasure warehouse where they stored all their supplies without being affected by temperature as well as the cold protection artifact that kept the surrounding area at a comfortable temperature.

“It’s extremely useful, as cooking would become problematic.”

While agreeing with Yue’s comment, Hajime turned his gaze to the front.

Yue followed his gaze ahead, seeing a man buried among the wall of ice with closed eyes like he was sleeping. He seemed to have sat down after becoming tired with his back to the wall and then become frozen there. With no visible injury, perhaps it was exhaustion from the cold?

“Hajime, somehow that corpse… doesn’t it seem strange?”

“Nn? …Ah… now that you mention it, isn’t he buried perfectly in the wall.”

“Yeah, but did the wall of ice form over him while he was sitting there, or was he taken into the wall?”

Shia’s neck was tilted as she eyed the corpse buried in the ice wall with a suspicious look. Shia made a good point. Did the wall expand to cover him, or did it pull him into it?

“… There is no reaction to magic from the ice or the corpse, just to be sure, should we destroy it?”

They could have left it the way it was, because there was no reason not to. Hajime pulled out Donner, aimed it at the corpse, and pulled the trigger.

Bang! Bang!

A vivid brilliant red flash shot from Hajime through the forehead and heart of the man. It was even more brilliant than usual as a result of the sublimation magic.

Towards desecrating the dead, Kouki opened his mouth to complain, but then shut it again, having learned it was unproductive to try to complain.

After a few seconds of watching the corpse and the ice wall, there was no reaction. Hajime holstered Donner and urged the party to move ahead. … Hajime and the party disappeared into the recesses of the cave after a moment.

Crack… Crack…

“Goo, Gao, gigi.”

A sound like a groaning voice came out as the ice formed cracks.

Not noticing what was happening behind them, Hajime and the party continued to traverse the labyrinth in silence.

Though the Ice and Snow cave had many branching paths, they didn’t hesitate at any given intersection thanks to the compass. On their way along, the walls were littered with a lot more corpses trapped into the ice wall, but after a 1/3 the distance of the labyrinth, they had yet to see a single monster attack.

“Nn?… again?”

Another corpse was discovered buried in the ice wall in the passage ahead. With pointed ears and dark skin… it was a person from the demon country.

“… 50 people so far, most demons.”

“Perhaps there were a large number of people that attempted to capture it with Freed?” Hajime answered Yue, who was standing alone and muttering to herself.

They couldn’t tell from the clothing how long they had been there, but at least ten of the ones they had found wore service uniforms that matched the ones they saw during the attack on the capital.

“Fumu… though they were able to beat this labyrinth, it appears they didn’t do it with ease. When thinking about the other routes, how many people challenged it?”

“However, considering how many people in the country that might have attempted it, there might be someone other than Freed who had managed to complete it. It might be only a matter of time before the demon country reorganizes and attacks again.”

Kaori responded while showing a look of concern, possibly worrying for Liliana or the other classmates left in the capital.

“It’s alright Kaori, they won’t be doing it soon. The invaders were crushed, their weapon was destroyed, and the magical barrier was restored. Not to mention they don’t know that Hajime’s laser weapon was destroyed. They won’t find it that easy to attack even if they prepare a new army.”

“Shizuku… un, that’s right.” Kaori gave a smile after thinking about Shizuku’s prediction.

However, when they returned to Earth with Hajime, Liliana and the country would be deserted. It was only natural that it’d hurt to think about the ones left behind.

From there, Kouki entered into the conversation.

“Be relieved Kaori, even if I have to defeat mad gods, humans, or devils, I will remain and protect Liliana. After I obtain all the Age of Gods magic, it might be possible to return by myself sooner or later, so I will not desert anyone.”

“Kouki…”

Indeed, it was a hero-like speech, however Kouki’s glance was not given towards Kaori, but Hajime, as though he was trying to insult him. Therefore, Kaori was not relieved by his words, rather, it only made her feel more uneasy.

Before, there might have been complete conviction in his words, always only meaning well. However, now they seemed to be filled with negative emotions, including envy… doubt… impatience… irritation, ect… These various feeling were mixed in to his words even though he desperately tried to suppress them, causing his words to ring with instability.

Did Hajime take notice to this look from Kouki? Hajime merely ignored it and shrugged his shoulders. Kouki frowned over their ideals running on parallel tracks.

Shizuku’s gaze wandered towards those that were giving an uneasy mood, namely Kouki, however, Hajime spoke instead.

“Oh well… it’s not like we’re strangers… if the princess requested it, I could probably provide her with intercontinental ballistic missiles, high speed orbital tanks, and fighters that ignore inertia and gravity…?”

“Nagumo? Isn’t it too dangerous to give those to that woman? The power of balance for this world would collapse.”

“Is that so? Oh well, I could put on some user restrictions so they only work and can be operated by the royal family. At that level, nearly anything could be repulsed, even if more like Nointo came.”

Shizuku’s gaze wavered as Hajime gave a slightly dangerous speech while Kouki watched Hajime with dark eyes. Meanwhile, Kaori wore a somewhat happy expression.

Though Hajime was trying to avoid living a “lonely way of life”, there was no reason for him to be involved in this world’s problems, unless it was for Yue and the others. With the exception of perhaps Myuu and Remia, no one in this world could equal the balance of their importance in his heart.

Because Liliana is someone he knew, he'd be willing to lend his power if she requested it. Afterwards though, he had no intentions past spending the remainder of his life with Yue and the others at his home.

When considering the possibility that he'd lose the ones important to him, he felt no guilt and saw no important reason to risk his own life.

With his efforts, he had decided to give Yue and the rest's smiles his priority, and could discard anything outside of that.

Because they understood this, Yue, and the others snuggled up to Hajime. Shia and Kaori's path took them away from their family and important childhood friends.

Moreover, this extremely dangerous present for Liliana could be said to be the very limit of consideration he could offer her.

"Yaegashi (Shizuku), you and the rest also must decide what you'll do once you return from the demon country. Will you remain in this world? Will you return with us? Because I won't wait for you to decide."

"… Yes. Understood."

"Yes. It'll depend on my conversation with Eri…" Suzu said.

"I'll stick with Kouki." Ryuutaro added.

Everyone responded to Hajime's words, each of the three in their own way.

With a sensitive mood hanging in the air, Hajime advanced along the passage until they came to a 4-way intersection with a ten meter width and height.

Upon halting, Hajime confirmed the direction the compass pointed. Suddenly, Shia's rabbit ears began to twitch.

"Hajime… something is coming."

"A monster, they finally appeared? Where?"

"All four sides…"

"Even from behind?"

Though everyone readied themselves for an attack, they stiffened when they heard that monsters were approaching from the path they had taken, because it would mean that they were able to conceal themselves from Hajime's Magic Eye.

In the center of the cross roads, Hajime and the party were back to back. After an interval a voice like a groan could be heard in the darkness of the passage. (TN: Not to be a nag here, but if you just moved 10-15 meters down any direction, you'd bottleneck the baddies and turn a 4 way battle into a two way).

Vaaa…

A fairly terrifying voice not quite like a beast's groan gave off unpleasant feelings. As the darkness in the passage also seemed to have deepened, the sound of someone swallowing their saliva with a gulp was heard through the silence.

And then it appeared.

It was the figure of a person wearing a service uniform, with most of their skin having lost their coloring and a thick layer of frost over their entire body.

"These guys… they're the corpses we saw in the ice walls?" Hajime muttered as members of the demon country poured into the passage one after another.

"… Also the guy we saw earlier."

"Are they alive… no, that's not it. They're like zombies?"

While watching the frozen people that showed up down the passage way, Yue and the other faced the demons and adventurers, who groaned and held out their arms loosely lowered. As Kaori said, they looked like frozen zombies.

Frost zombies began to pour out of each of the four roads of the intersection, surrounding Hajime, Kouki, and the others.

"In any case, even if they were former people, those that stand in our way will be slaughtered."

Hajime's words acted like a signal, and the frost zombie's dull movements suddenly became fierce.

VaAAAAA!!!

An extremely unpleasant grown echoes to through the many passages in the cave. Did they say you will be eaten here? It's like they were straight from Resident Evil (Biohazard), though they weren't as gross thanks to the layer of frost preventing them from decaying, but an ugly thing is still ugly.

"Please stay away! Barrier Burst!"

To real biohazards, a somewhat panicked Suzu released the Barrier burst. It goes down the passage, and any Frost zombies who were struck by it were hurled away, but the next moment… They exploded magnificently into pieces with a roar.

They splintered apart, like pieces of meat dispersed by a bomb. It was like the scene when the Terminator in liquid nitrogen was smashed.

At almost the same time, all the other party members began to shoot out their attacks. Hajime's Schlag spouted fire, Yue and Tio sent out wind magic, Kaori's silver feathers flew, Shizuku and Kouki's blades drew deadly lines through the air, and strong impacts were released from Ryuutaro's fists.

To those attacks filled with the full destructive power colliding with the front ranks fo the frost zombies, those who didn't manage to evade shattered to the sound of crystal breaking.

"They're fairly fragile…" though Hajime mutters suspiciously, another second his eyes narrow.

"You're kidding, they're repairing themselves?"

Kaori seemed to have said this instinctively, but it was exactly that. The splinters began to gather, reforming their bodies in no time at all. The one's decomposed by Kaori's silver feathers assembled slightly differently, fathering the missing parts from nearby walls of ice.

"… Hajime, a demon stone?"

"… It isn't that. Though the magic is similar, they don't seem to have a demon stone."

"Eeh? They're like those golems from the labyrinth in the canyon?" (TN: They're talking about Milidi's labyrinth all those chapters ago)

Hajime wore a grim expression while Shia looked on with a disgusted look when she recalled the powerful and infinitely respawning enemies that repaired themselves no matter how much they destroyed them. They also didn't have a demon stone core and were destroyed only by Hajime's quick thinking.

"Just how many are there? There must be some trick."

While continuously firing, Hajime took out the compass with one hand to seek out the source of the demon core, which must be concealed in some way that his magic eye couldn't detect.

"Oo? It's nearby?"

The compass indicated a location that wasn't within the frost demon's body. The location was in the left passage, about 500 meters or so away.

Yue gave Hajime a look. "… Hajime?"

"… Apparently, the demon stone or whatever peculiar magic that moves these guys seems to be placed left from here. They must be controlled remotely."

Fumu… Anyway, if we don't get to the source somehow, this fight will never end.

"Then, let's go!"

Everyone gave off a determined air while knocking down the advancing Frost zombies. All four passaged were crowded with the zombies that had sprung up, perhaps extending as far as the eye could see?

"I've destroy the group ahead, everyone don't fall behind!"
Hajime ordered while taking Orkan (the rocket launcher) out of the treasure warehouse. After hearing their response, he pointed the rocket launcher towards one corner and released an overwhelming power.

Bashuuuuu!

Orange trails flew out behind a warhead.

Boom!

With a thunderous roar that resounded through the passage, they ran past the gap Hajime had made.

With Yue and rest behind him, Hajime thanked Orkan for clearing away the frost zombies like they were nothing. Even without being able to use fire or water magic, they kept being pulverized again and again, no matter how many times they regenerated.

Thanks to Hajime's continuous fire pulverizing the frost zombies, they had no trouble moving forward. As they passed by, those that were destroyed reformed themselves. Generally, the expressions of all the party members except Yue and Tio were cramped.

"Fueee… No a real life biohazard (resident evil)!"

"Suzu, get a hold of yourself, if you don't look too closely it's not that bad."

"No, that's bad!… Uuu… Don't come near me! Barrier Burst!"

"Suzu, please don't lose it! Do not waste your magical power…. Kyaaa! That's an arm!"

"Hiiii… Kaori, watch where you're aiming. That arm that just flew by touched me!"

Though it is said it is noisy when women gather, these four were in full-blown zombie panic and it was indeed noisy. It seemed like they challenged a certain famous horror house in Japan while noisily running through the passage and talking.

"Uumu… It's good to be young. Being able to make a racket like that while facing monsters…"

While looking over her shoulder at Kaori and the others, Tio responds fairly calmly. This caused Yue to give Tio an amazed look.

"… Tio, smells like an old woman."

"That's a terrible thing to say. Well, I'm older… but isn't Yue also?"

"… I'm not. I'll be 17 forever."

"What? I'm sure you were 20 when you were imprisoned…"

While hearing something unexpected, a shiver went up Hajime's spine in response to a crisis, causing him to say something to break the tension.

"… That's right! Yue is always 17!"

"… Nn. The same as Hajime."

"To be completely dominated by Yue…"

Tio wore an amazed expression, with the noisy group of girls in the rear, while Hajime is being led by the nose by Yue. Kouki and Ryuutaro looked at each other… in spite of being chased by frost zombies, their minds seemed to be playing out an impossible scene.

After dashing for five minutes, the sound where Hajime and party running, with a Zudodo from behind, the frost zombies continued to chase with screams and roars that caused the tunnel to shake.

Hajime and the group finally arrived at a large space which seemed to be about the size of the Tokyo Dome.

Hajime rechecked the compass in his hand. The area where the demon stone that controlled the zombie horde was definitely indicated to be in this room. To be accurate, it was incased in a certain ice wall facing the entrance they had just passed through.

“I found it. Here, I see it.”

Hajime could see deep into the ice wall with his Magic eye. Even the improved donner wouldn’t be able to penetrate deep enough to reach it, so Hajime took out Schlagen (TN: Schlag is one of his revolvers, Schlagen is his anti-material rifle) from his treasure warehouse.

Naturally, Schlagen had also been improved thanks to sublimation magic, which greatly increased its specs. It would surely pierce the armor that had protected Miledi’s golem now.

Bachibachi! Bachibachi!

Electricity intensely discharged as the anti-material rifle that specialized in penetration scatters a vivid bright red light. Hajime held Shlagen with one hand while catching it to the side. Just as he went to pull the trigger…

“… Hajime!
At the same time as Yue’s warning, a large eagle that unfurled its wings from overhead began to assault the party.

It was not simply a large eagle, but it was transparent, and appeared to be bade of the same material as the ice wall, more were falling down like a downpour of ice.

Hajime momentarily fired overhead, and a flash went into the sky. At the moment of impact, it pierced the Frost eagle and the shock wave shattered it with a red ripple into two frost eagles.

The improved bullet with impact conversion was empowered with sublimation magic, increasing the power by more than three times that of Donners.

As a shimmering rain of ice came down from above, right after pulling the trigger, Hajime re-aimed the muzzle back towards the demon stone.

However…

“It moved…”

The demon stone in the wall began to move all of a sudden, moving out of the line of fire of Schlagen.

“Apparently, it’s similar to the creature we faced in the oasis, so I should think all the surrounding ice is its territory. Make note of that.”

Prompt advice came from Tio, who was dealing with a frost zombie and another frost eagle.

That advice was proven correct immediately.

“Guriaaa!”

Next from the surrounding ice wall, a large amount of two-legged wolves were created as well as frost eagles. They had large dark red eyes, were two meters all, with sharp teeth and claws, groaning with a bestial voice. Frost werewolves.

The large space was suddenly buried with large amounts of these three types of demons, and like those before, as soon as they were smashed, they reformed.

A frost zombie from the rear let out a large groaning voice at the party, overflowing with something.

From the surrounding walls, ridiculous amounts of frost werewolves appeared to encircle the party.

In addition,

Bikibiki. Baki!

With suck sound effects, the demon stone in the ice wall let out an amazing amount of power, increasing every second.

And,

“Kuwaaa!”

A roar, followed by a large shock wave.

“Absolute Field.”

At once, Yue created a barrier by distorted space which warded off the effects of the earthquake.

Opposite of that barrier, the creature that held the demon stone finally showed itself. It was like the turtle-like demonic beings who had attacked the capital before, but its body was mostly composed of ice and the shell had icicles like a pin cushion over twenty meters in length.

“Apparently, the trial is to pierce the demon stone in that guy while dealing with all of these demons?”

Hajime took a guess while smiling scornfully – a normal party in such a cold place after wondering for so long would probably despair having to fight like this. Unfortunately for these monsters, they weren’t a normal party, and thanks to Hajime’s artifacts the temperature wasn’t a problem either.

The cold and the pressure that the frost turtle gave off caused Kouki and his party to pale, but Hajime only glared at it with scornful eyes.

At the same time, Hajime let loose his immense killing intent and pressure. A wave of red magic hit the surrounding monsters and immediately broken them to pieces. Somehow, even the frost turtle flinched at that.

Hajime took a single step forward.

The frost turtle let out a roar as if to deny that it flinched from a mere human, and all the surrounding demons began to move together.

The Ice and snow cave… the first trial started here.

Chapter 138 – Frost Turtle

“Well, first of all… Amanokawa, charge forward!”

“Eh?”

While Hajime and the Frost Turtle let out enormous waves of pressure towards each other from their killing intent, Kouki had thought they would start fighting. Instead, he was called forward, and thus gave Hajime a startled response.

“No ‘eh’, charge forward and quickly crush that turtle.”

“W-why me?” Kouki asked instinctively.

Hajime turned around and gave him an amazed look while continuing to shoot down the surrounding monsters one shot at a time.

“Ah, you guys came here to do what? It’s not likely to count if we just do it all for you…”

“… A that’s right!”

“Amanokawa, use all of your power to crush the big guy. The other three of you (Suzu, Ryuutaro, Shizuku), support him while the rest of us keep the small fries off of you. Do it quickly. If you wuss out, I’ll finish the job.” Hajime smiled provocatively.

Kouki gave a strong nod, flames of determination sprouting in his eyes.

“Leave it to me. I’ll show you I can absolutely knock it down. Shizuku… Suzu, Ryuutaro, Let’s go!”

“Oo, Let’s go!”

“I’ll cover you. Take care of the icicles behind me. There may be some trick to them.”

“Leave the defense to me. I’ll show you I can protect everyone!”

After everyone answered energetically, a silver flash struck the monsters near the Frost Turtle, disintegrating them in an instant.

“Go! Don’t do anything rash!”

Thanks to Kaori’s silver bombardment of disintegration, an easy route had been opened up between Kouki’s party and the Frost Turtle. They ran forward while thanking her.

While its red eyes shone, the gap they formed immediately began to fill with demons once again.

“What are you doing? Your opponent is me! Trembling Heaven Triagram!”

As the turtle was focused on Hajime, Kouki’s party ran towards the Frost Turtle while Kouki shouted out his favored technique.

A killer attack of light flew forward, directly striking the eerily shining eyes of the Frost Turtle and tearing them up. A shock wave followed, hallowing that wound.

“KuWaAAn!”

With part of its head crushed, and only one eye remaining, the Frost Turtle raised a roar while shooting killing intent at Kouki's party. This was all going according to Kouki's plan.

And with its mouth gaping open, a breath of ice and snow was expelled out!

Spiraling like a tornado filled with ice chips, any who were caught in it would freeze immediately. Even if you could endure the cold, the ice would cut you to ribbons.

However, they had a master of magical barriers they could rely on.

"Faster than the wind, quicker than the water, Over Saint Scatter!"

By reinforcing the magic's image with chanting, Suzu created a Barrier that dispersed energy. The bombardment of ice and snow collided with the barrier, making a "gou!" sound. And even though it came with a terrific impact, the energy was dispersed and could not overcome the barrier.

"It will keep regening indefinitely as long as it contains the demon stone. Don't waste time. It is necessary to end this in one blow."

"My Heaven's Might takes thirty seconds to reach maximum power."

"Then, in the meantime, it's fine if Kouki doesn't need to do anything."

While Suzu prevented the attack with her barrier, Shizuku explained while giving Kouki a look. Considerable thermal power would be required to destroy the demon stone and crush the gigantic figure of the Frost Turtle. Kouki would be the most suitable.

Kouki understood this, given the time it'd take to execute his attack. Before, it took over a minute or more to reach maximum power. The time had been shortened considerably and amplified by several times, thanks to the revision of the Holy Sword.

"Everyone, the attack is weakening!"

"Good. When the attack stops, spread out… Suzu, stay with me."

"Understood! You can count on me!"

At almost the same moment as Suzu's words, the attack came to an end. The ice and snow fell down and Shizuku and the rest spread out as Kouki ordered.

Shizuku dashed out low to the ground, slipping under the Frost Turtle.

"The first attack, Flashing Blossom!"

With a sharp aura drawing black tracks in the air, her target was the Frost Turtle's legs. To the large transparent foot, a gap of space formed diagonally, cutting the foot in two, which slid roughly and dropped to the floor.

"Flashing Blossom! Flashing Blossom!"

Without a pause, Shizuku kept advancing while sliding around, severing the second foot on one side. It slipped out, leaving the remainder in the rear side.

“KuruaaA!?”

Cheers! Feeling pleased, the sword returned to its scabbard. The two feet slipped down diagonally and with a scream the Frost Turtle went down.

“Zzuzuuzun!”

The Frost Turtle that had lost its balance made the Earth tremble. Immediately, a strong thirst for blood was shot behind the Frost Turtle stretching across its long neck.

“Tsu!?”

With her skin raising like goose flesh, Shizuku’s intuition convinced her to dash from the place she was standing. A large number of icicles pushed out from the ground where she had been.

Like frozen flowers blooming from the Earth, sharp icicles bloomed in a trail following Shizuku.

“Aerodynamic!”

While being chased by quickly forming icicles, Shizuku barely made it into the air before flowering icicles swallowed her path.

However, at that time, three frost eagles with exquisite timing attacked her from three different directions, respectively.

“…. flash…”

While attempting to shoot out a Flashing Blossom, she didn’t seem to be able to make it in time. There was no way she could avoid the terrible claws from at least two of the frost eagles.

At that moment, Shizuku prepared to take damage—

Three red flashes passed by her surroundings.

With unflinching aim, those flashes shot through the center of the chest of each of the frost eagles, causing them to burst into shimmering pieces.

In recognition of the attack, Shizuku’s eyes flickered to the origin… where Hajime was enclosed by a considerable amount of demonic beasts. He was using a combination of cross bits and Metsurai (TN: Gatling Gun). However, what caught her eye was the muzzle of Donner.

“From there, precision fire without even seeing.”

Even with a distance of twenty meters or more, and with the power of the bullets and the penetration for the bullets having increased by three times, the shock wave from the explosive bullets couldn’t reach her with so many demons between them.

So, how did the precision fire reach Shizuku?

The answer was easy: You only had to shot through them.

That is to say that Hajime shot through the openings between the frost eagles and other monsters - between their groins, under their wings… Shooting with precision like firing through the eye of a needle. Without visually checking, he executed a perfectly cheat-like ability that could be called a miracle.

While forgetting the battle surrounding her, Shizuku was charmed by the power that Hajime wielded. It wasn't until her childhood friend shouted that her consciousness came back into focus.

"Don't get carried away! Heavy Crash!!"

While attempting to wake up Shizuku, who used aerodynamic, Ryuutaro ran through the air and flew down from above, striking the Frost Turtle towards the head using a fist wrapped in a gauntlet artifact with the strength of a meteorite.

With a roaring sound, the Frost Turtle's head crushed with a shock wave. Thanks to the gravity magic on his gauntlet, an icicle attack following Shizuku was interrupted. Ryuutaro gave a premature grin after seeing the results of his attack.

Immediately after the head was crushed, a new head appeared from the root.

"Geh!? Shi—"

To the dark red eyes glinting from inside the shell, Ryuutaro let out an expletive instinctively. The next moment, it let out a breath attack of ice and snow, and Ryuutaro attempted to execute Vajra while crossing both of his arms at once.

However, a hexagonal barrier immediately came into existence, parting the attack. Bikibiki sounds denoted the cracks forming thanks to the powerful attack. A second later, the same barrier formed again, doubling, and then doubling again.

"Suzu's Heavenly Barrier?"

While Ryuutaro exclaimed in surprise, he turned his gaze to the small magical barrier master who was chanting ahead near Kouki.

Suzu returned a smile at Ryuutaro's look.

Ryuutaro's guess was half right.

"Expulsion Space."

Expulsion space was a defense magic made when compounding magic of two or more barriers. Heavenly barrier was joined with expulsion. Originally, Suzu didn't have the ability to compound magic, however, thanks to her iron-ribbed fan artifact, the function that allowed magic compounding was obtained.

To Ryuutaro, who was stuck in the barrier under attack from the breath attack, Suzu cast Expulsion Space in a panic. Particularly after seeing a frost eagle attempting to assault him from behind. However, it was unnecessary. Immediately before reaching him, a powerful thunder dragon appeared and consumed it.

"UoOO!? That surprised me!"

While shooting sparks, the great magic dragon passed Ryuutaro who had a drooping expression while uttering such a complaint.

Yue, while directing the seven-headed serpent with slender fingers which danced like batons, turned a quick glance at Ryuutaro, causing his jaws to drop.

With an expression of impossible confidence, she put out a gesture that scolded him which seemed to say that he shouldn't react to every little thing, and should instead concentrate on his target. Even the thick-headed Ryuutaro seemed to get what she was trying to express.

"Really, every last one of Nagumo's women are amazing. I can't imagine how he managed to make them all fall in love with him."

Ryuutaro had a wry smile, struggling to imagine how the Hajime he knew from back in Japan managed to do it. While executing Vajra, he began to charge, motivated by the fact that Yue was watching him.

As a matter of fact, he fell in love with her at first sight, and was disappointed in love immediately thereafter, thanks to the pink space generated between her and Hajime. He couldn't even tell his best friend Kouki.

After being showed that sweet space many times between the two, he was able to arrange his feelings. Still, if Yue glanced at him, he couldn't say he didn't become happy for a moment.

"Well, mostly…"

While ridiculing himself again, he crushed the head of the frost turtle, while Shizuku again chopped the feet that regenerated on the lowered side.

Naturally though, it was incapacitated, its temporary stop in movement would be over soon, and after just thirty seconds.

It is, in a word…

"Shizuku! Ryuutaro. Fall back. I will go… you monster… Heaven's Might!"

That's right, the time necessary to execute Kouki's Heaven's Might was reached, the enormous light like a fixed star spiraling from his holy sword proved as such.

Kouki lept forward using a disc created with Aerodynamic, swinging to pierce the frost turtle whose eyes were bugged out.

DoOOOO!!

The aura undulated, and it almost seemed like the sun rose in the hall, such a huge quantity of pure-white light dyed the surroundings.

The Frost Turtle, to that bombardment of light falling towards it, transformed its shell into a cone, in an attempt to distribute the power of the attack. A five meter diameter light impacted the back of the Frost Turtle.

"Kuwaaaan!!!"

A terrific impact sounded and reverberated in the entire area. The screaming of the Frost Turtle resounded with frustration. Its shell, even with its transformation which according to its plan, would distribute the power of the attack – Heaven's Might was indeed distributed.

However, while under normal circumstances this attack was powerful – thanks to Hajime's remodelling, it was now even stronger. Kouki's last resort melted the conic tip, and the armor of ice surrounding the shell disappeared magnificently while white smoke rose.

"Please disappear as it is! Let this power be enough!!"

The Frost Turtle's eyes began to brighten as it absorbed the surrounding ice to regenerate. Kouki let out a shout with a desperate look. If his authentic maximum attack that spent all of his magical might was endured completely, it'd be proof that he still hadn't reached the level of attack needed for a Great Dungeon monster.

Since meeting Hajime again, the unpleasantness and painful feelings overflowed. He wanted to do it by means of his own power, by all means.

"… Kouki…"

Nearby Suzu said, with a slightly frightened expression after seeing Kouki's look.

"OoOOO!!!"

"KuWaAAA!"

The screaming of Kouki and the Frost Turtle collided.

In a moment.

Crack.

After hearing such a sound, innumerable fissure appeared around the Frost Turtle, and ice chips scattered with a pitter pater to the ground.

And,

DoPaAAaA!

The light of the Heaven's Might crushed that gigantic figure from the back, eliminating the surrounding ground so that there was no free time to allow regeneration. Light swallowed up the front and back of the Frost Turtle.

The scene was like a sea liner breaking in half while sinking.

"KuaaA."

With a sighing rattle, the dark red light went out from the Frost Turtle's eyes.

And after a beat the light that swallowed the Frost Turtle gradually reduced, returning the space to normal.

"Woot! Haha… defeated, by me…"

While intensely panting, Kouki tottered. Aerodynamic lost its power, and his body fell, only supported by the nearby Suzu.

“Kouki, are you o…”

Suzu, while supporting him, starting to ask anxiously at that time –

Boba!

While making such a noise, a frost eagle swooped up from the crater where the remains of the Frost Turtle were scattered, while gripping something with both of its talons.

“Why, how come it’s still moving?”

“Kouki… Look at that.”

Kouki looked with tired eyes in astonishment after seeing the area Suzu indicated with a strained voice where she pointed. A dark red crystal was gripped in the talons of the frost eagle…

“Da-damn it! It wasn’t destroyed? However, you’re not getting away.”

While grinding his teeth, Kouki who had used up all of his power while thinking he had destroyed the demon stone with his Heaven’s Might snapped.

The moment the Frost Turtle had judged it wouldn’t be able to win against his attack, it seemed to have returned to its origin within the demon stone and created a frost eagle to bear it away.

Kouki again rose his holy sword with an unsteady hand. Because the mana absorption effect was added to Kouki’s armor by Hajime, he didn’t feel the effect of mana exhaustion.

With no time to delay thanks to the frost eagle with the demon stone that started to make sounds of transformation, Kouki started to press the attack. Not heading for Suzu, he ignored his mana exhaustion like he was possessed.

Even if he had a strong will, the light that gathered in the holy sword was weak. Looking at it, Kouki started to chant the spell for Limit Break.

“With Limit Break…”

“Kouki… listen to me!”

Suzu yelled angrily. Though it’s possible to regain his strength after using Limit Break – the after effects would be great, and it wouldn’t be easy to recover even with recovery magic – and while it would most likely be able to recover completely with regeneration magic, it would use a considerable amount of Hajime’s party magic.

Even though he was pushing ahead alone, Kouki was surrounded by allies… and there was no need to overwork himself.

“The importance of flash claw, break!”

With her sword drawing skill, Shizuku raced through the air while firing a blade of wind that cut the demon stone and the frost eagle that was transmogrifying into pieces.

A dark blue light expanded, along with a shock wave that came from the demon stone in front of Shizuku. She faced it, blocking with her sheath.

The ability of impact conversion was granted to the black sword's sheath.

The impact was transmitted directly to the demon stone, a fissure began to form with a "bikibiki" sound, and finally…

"Ha!"

Goba!

It was crushed completely, detailed splinters of dark red sparkling crystal fell to the Earth.

At the same time, the large amounts of monsters filling the hall all collapsed together with a rattle, becoming nothing more than lumps of ice.

"……"

"……"

Kouki looked at the scene dumbfounded. Though Suzu supported his shoulder, he was staring around uneasily and didn't seem to notice.

A splendid, cheerful voice rang out.

"Hahaha. We've done it..! Kouki! We won!"

"Eh? Ryuutaro…?"

"Yeah… how to say it… look at that spiraled shell. Heaven's Might look at that crater. As expected of Kouki."

Thanks to the expression of his best friend who was hitting his shoulder, Kouki's obsessed expression returned to his normal one. However, Suzu who was supporting Kouki was still panicked.

"That's right. I, No… we won. To the Great Labyrinth monster."

"Yeah, it's refreshing. After pushing on since before…"

"Haha, certainly, for a moment it is a little refreshing."

"Right? The day when we can catch up to Nagumo seems to come a bit closer."

"… Its good if that's the case."

While expressing gratitude to Suzu, whose shoulder he borrowed, Kouki stood tall by himself with a wry smile. Thanks to the brightness of Ryuutaro, his dark mood cleared up a little. However, a deep regret remained that he was not able to do it with his own power.

"Shizuku…"

"? Thanks for the hard work, Kouki."

Shizuku returned by jumping down to Kouki's position. Kouki smoothed over his sharp glance while panicking. Though Shizuku felt somewhat uneasy after looking at Kouki's appearance, she gave thanks for the hard work after their long awaited victory.

"Is that right? Apart from that, Kouki's Heaven's Might, your strongest attack, since strengthening the holy sword, was more than I imagined."

"That's right! That's right! An amazing blow."

"Ma… something like that is…"

While Shizuku modestly praised the Heaven's Might that caused the crater before her eyes, making light of her own achievements, Suzu tried to dispel the desperate feeling in the air with clichéd praise.

As might be expected, Kouki felt embarrassed: being praised by two girls in parting, while smiling and scratching his cheek.

A voice comes from behind Kouki's party.

"Oo~i, though it's good to enjoy your victory, it would be good to leave soon!"

While looking at Hajime, who was standing on a mountain of ice showing a cool appearance without an indication he had taken on a thousand opponents, he tapped his shoulder with Donner while indicating a direction.

An advancing passage seemed to have appeared in the wall where the Frost Turtle had come from.

While Kouki's party nodded to each other, they headed over to Hajime, who released Aerodynamic.

"Grats. You seem to be able to fight without any trouble against the Great Labyrinth monster."

For Hajime that expressed rare words of praise, a look that seemed like it was observing a rare animal was turned towards Kouki. Do biting words come from such a glance? Shizuku answered with a panic towards Hajime who gave such a look.

"Yes… thank you. Thanks for the power of these artifacts."

"Well… you seemed to have mastered them well. Although, I wasn't worried since we're fighting as a group, anyway."

"Yeah? While you might think it was trivial, the precision firing I saw Nagumo use sent shivers up my back."

"… When death approaches – a person can do the unexpected."

To the faraway look in Hajime's eyes while recalling the past…. Shizuku expressed a smile while thinking about his reliability.

"As far as that goes… Nagumo. Did we pass?"

Irritated, Kouki diverted the conversation between Hajime and Shizuku.

"N? Ah, to say were your efforts accepted?"

“That’s right.”

“It should be alright, given the concept of this Great Labyrinth.”

“In what way…”

Kouki inclined his neck to the previous comment. Hajime turned his eyes to Tio, seeking her confirmation. Tio, who opened her mouth, expressed her full approval.

“With infinity reproducing monsters, with the ability to freeze you to death, and a master-class monster built like a fortress, it was certainly troublesome. However, if you fight only a strong monster, isn’t that the same as Orcus? The concept isn’t clear for the Ice and Snow Cave.”

“Though all of us knocked down at least three digits worth of monsters.”

“Because there were over a thousand monsters to overwhelm us, I don’t think we failed.”

“… Nn, without question.”

Hajime’s group said one after another, calm and composed as those who had the most experience in great labyrinth clearing compared to Kouki’s party.

While thinking such differences were being shown off, the dark and unpleasant feelings once again swirled in Kouki’s heart while he showed a consenting face.

Shizuku, who was worried about Kouki’s appearance, left it for later, since Hajime was urging them forward.

And again… they went forward into the passage enclosed with large ice walls.

After walking for thirty minutes, as the last light was seen at the tip of the passage… the extended maze was vast, like a joke.

Chapter 139 – Labyrinth

Spreading out below them was a vast maze.

It was vast maze inside a great labyrinth. That was the scene they were now looking at from the exit of the passage.

The walls overhead formed a vault. The maze could easily be confused with an athletic park if not for its sheer size. Based only on what they could see, the maze was at least 1 kilometer deep. They couldn’t see anything farther because of the snowfall, but since the width of the maze seemed to be at least 10 kilometers, it could be guessed that the depth wouldn’t be any less.

From the exit of the passage where they were currently standing, there were stairs leading down to the maze. At the end of the stairs stood an arch-shaped entrance to the maze. It seemed that after entering the maze, getting to the exit would be the second trial of the great labyrinth.

“What, do we have to pass through such an insanely huge maze? How annoying!”

“Ryuutaro, it can’t be helped. This is part of the trials.”

“But still!”

Ryuutaro hated trivialness. While looking at the maze below, his expression distorted into one of complete irritation. Kouki, while forcing a smile, was trying to calm him down, only to receive a dissatisfied look in return.

Then at that time, Ryuutaro suddenly grinned. It seemed he had thought of something.

“Oi. I just thought of something good. Now that we’re in an open space, let’s just fly over it!”

Without a word, but a with a face which seemed to say “I’ve got it!”, Ryuutaro used “Aerodynamic” and jumped into the air.

“Ba, Baka! Come back!”

“Ryu, Ryuutaro-kun!”

Shizuku and Suzu impatiently tried to restrain Ryuutaro whose imprudence knew no bounds.

Kouki also promptly reached out to stop him but it was already too late.

It looked like Ryuutaro got a little excited at the seemingly easy way out of the trial. The muscle-headed Ryuutaro who always rushed in seemed even more careless than usual this time. Being always positive and active could be considered one of Ryuutaro’s strong points, but since he often went too far, it was more of weak point in the end. And this kind of weakness is fatal in a great labyrinth.

Hajime crossed his arms as he stared observingly at Ryuutaro’s recklessness, who finally reached the overhead boundary line of the great labyrinth.

At that moment,

Voonn!!

“Nuwaa!?”

A sound that seemed to bend the air itself resounded, the air surrounding Ryuutaro virtually shook. Immediately after, Ryuutaro’s shape disappeared.

“Ryuutaro!?”

“Ah mou! This fool!”

“Fuue!? What do we do! Nagumo-kun, Ryuutaro-kun has disappeared!”

Kouki and his party frantically asked. With a face on the verge of tears, Suzu desperately asked for Hajime’s help.

As for Hajime, he was concentrating on the information provided by his demon eye stone and didn’t look like he was paying any attention to Suzu’s plea for help. She had been completely ignored.

The moment the air bent, Hajime’s demon eye stone sensed the action of a magical power. At the same time, Hajime picked up a magical response from the corner of his field of vision and had shifted his gaze toward its direction. At the end of his line of sight, before they knew it, a hexagonal prism of ice was

hanging from the ceiling. At that very location, a similar phenomenon of air distortion had occurred during which the ice prism sprouted from the ceiling, revealing the figure of Ryuutaro inside the prism.

“He’s right there.”

“Ehh?”

“What?”

“Where!”

They all reacted to Hajime’s answer and followed his gaze. Then they became speechless. That was because they saw their childhood friend, who had disappeared, in the ice prism, looking like a specimen would in an exhibition.

On the other hand, despite being inside the block of ice, Ryuutaro’s expression had turned frantic, as though he had still retained his consciousness.

However, thinking things had suddenly taken a turn for the worse would be an overstatement. Indeed, Ryuutaro was not inside stone, but ice. It looked like he had activated “Vajra” and was trying his best to free himself. However, he seemed unable to move, and he was in pain with every breath he took.

Moreover, as if to make sure the trespasser was properly dealt with, countless icicles with sharp edges had grown from the surrounding ceiling.

“This, This is bad…”

“This pattern, it’s unmistakably…”

“Awawa, I have to deploy a barrier right now.”

Naturally, they were instantly able to guess who the icicles which had appeared were pointing at, and their faces turned pale.

A panicked Suzu was trying to deploy a barrier to protect him, but since the ceiling was 500 meters above their heads, it was hard to deploy it at the right coordinates immediately. This is why deploying a barrier on her current position and launching it towards Ryuutaro might be the best way to go about it. However, would it make it in time?

“U~n, even with a barrier it seems he would die from suffocation sooner or later… Why would there be a need for drilling icicles to begin with?”

“Can’t you lend a hand without analyzing things so calmly!?”

Shizuku retorted with a face on the verge of tears while Hajime simply tilted his neck in response.

Hajime was thinking that the icicles were some kind of guarantee in case Ryuutaro somehow managed to escape, and that they wouldn’t attack immediately if left alone. He planned to share his conjecture with the others, but it seemed Shizuku and the others were feeling really uneasy about their comrade’s predicament.

Hajime shrugged his shoulders in response to Shizuku and turned his gaze toward Yue and Kaori. They both gave a small nod, showing they had understood Hajime's intentions. Rather, taking into account the speed with which the spell was cast, it looked like Yue had guessed Hajime's request before he could even shift his gaze to her.

"Field Pierce."

"Mou, it can't be helped, because Ryuutaro-kun's bad habit never changes no matter how much time passes…"

The space before Kaori's eyes opened and a transfer gate appeared. The opposite gate's light shone from the side of the ice prism which entrapped Ryuutaro.

With a wry smile, Kaori deployed her silver wings and fired a large number of silver feathers through the gate.

After crossing the gate and fluttering around Ryuutaro's surroundings, the silver feathers clung to the ice prism and started decomposing it effortlessly.

Seeing the prey escaping, as if making a judgment of their own, the countless icicles which had sprouted from the surrounding ceiling finally started shooting towards Ryuutaro.

Nevertheless, the prism which was covered with feathers like a cocoon was in itself a protective wall due to the decomposition effect of the feathers. Consequently, the group of icicles which was fired from the ceiling like the projectiles of a Gatling gun turned into mist as it met the silver feathers, leaving not even the trace of a single ice shard, and was carried away with the wind.

"Kaori, while you're at it, you carry out his punishment. Decompose this fool's groin."

While Kouki and the others were breathing a sigh of relief after seeing Ryuutaro saved by the silver feathers of a Kaori whose body was suited for both offense and defense, Hajime spat out these merciless words. Kouki's mouth was flapping open and closed with a face saying "what a scary punishment!"

"Gr, Groin… There's no way I can do such a thing! Ha, Hajime-kun, no ecchi!"

To a Kaori who had been thrown into panic due to her misinterpretation of Hajime's words, Yue added more fuel to the fire with a cold look.

"… What exactly is ecchi in decomposing a fool's groin? Kaori, you react too much to the word 'Groin', you pervert." (En: *Delete's his groin decomposition sadism fanfic.*)

"N, No! Yue! To do that I have to touch his groin with my silver feathers right? Isn't that the same thing as indirectly telling me to touch Ryuutaro-kun's groin! That's ecchi!"

"No matter what you say, that doesn't change the fact that you overreacted to the word 'Groin' and your face turned red. You pervert."

"Yue just wants to make me look like a pervert right!? I, I am not someone who has any interest in things like groins!"

“Ho… Does that statement also apply to Hajime’s groin?”

“!? Th, That’s, how to say it…, I just, I just a little, Umm…”

“… Nn. As I thought, you pervert. You groin master.”

“How mean! No matter how you look at it that title is just too cruel! Hajime-kun, I truly don’t have any excessive interest in groins! I swear!”

“Aa~ Nn. I got it. It’s my fault for starting this conversation to begin with. Now, you two, stop repeatedly talking about groins. Look, Amanogawa doesn’t look like he can take it any longer. Taniguchi looks about to breathe fire. Yaegashi looks like a mother seeing off her grown-up daughter.”

Being told so by an amazed Hajime, Kaori turned towards Kouki and the others. Indeed, they seemed to be exactly in the state Hajime described.

Kouki, with a face saying “Where did that pure and innocent Kaori I know go?”, had turned his head away to escape from reality and his gaze was wandering in circles. Suzu, while making a red face, was muttering “Adult, Adult …”.

And then Shizuku, while looking a little lonely somewhere inside, was looking at Kaori with an affectionate face, like the face of a mother rejoicing at the growth of her daughter.

Kaori shivered. At this rate, she was going to be thought of as a pervert excessively interested in groins by her childhood friends.

She panicked and took a step forward to explain herself. At that moment,

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaa!! It hurrrrrts!!”

A shriek came from above. It was Ryuutaro’s voice. Startled, they all looked above. There was no longer the sweeping fire of icicles. Instead, all they caught sight of was the shining silver cocoon. Then they could guess why Ryuutaro was screaming. Ryuutaro vigorously gave Kaori a look implying “Idiot”.

“Ehh? Ah! Ryu, Ryutaro-kun, I’m sorry!!”

Kaori hurriedly undid the cocoon of silver feathers.

Inside, Ryuurato’s worn-out face appeared, his eyes rolling back in his head.

The prism had been decomposed a while ago. Kaori who was busy trying to come up with a justification had completely forgotten to cancel the spell. As a result, Ryuutaro who was inside had started decomposing as well.

Ryuutaro, devoid of any power, started free falling to the ground. Suzu created a light web to receive him and then brought him to their current location.

No one wanted to look at Ryuutaro whose clothes had been tattered. When Ryuutaro’s nude muscular half was exposed, everyone averted their eyes in a different direction.

Hajime sent a gaze to Kouki and the others who had averted their eyes implying “Amenogawa, you guys are supposed to be close friends right……” but Kouki kept his gaze away from Ryuutaro and started surveying the surroundings unnaturally as if looking out for any sign of danger.

Ryuutaro’s nether region seemed safe, but its surrounding clothes were gone. Close friends or not, it couldn’t be helped that they had all averted their eyes.

His eyes were rolled back in his head and he was in a tattered state. This day would be known as the day the 17-year-old’s groin was exposed publicly. This day would undoubtedly remain a part of Ryuutaro’s dark past forever.

With all her strength, Kaori closed her eyes while keeping her gaze away, using reproduction magic to lend the forsaken Ryuutaro a hand.

“….. Kaori, you’re a cruel person. Ripping his clothes at that place.”

“That was the result of your being mean and distracting me earlier!”

“….. Nn. Shifting the responsibility to someone else is bad. Now take responsibility and heal him without looking away.”

“No, No way! There’s nothing to see! I don’t want to see anything besides Hajime’s!”

“As a master healer, you can’t do things that way. Now, look properly. And burn it into your memory, the groin of another person than Hajime, that is.”

“Nooo! Stop it! Stop pushing me! Don’t force me into a sexual relationship I don’t want!”

While Kaori was forcefully helping Ryuutaro, Yue used just the right amount of wind magic to try to open Kaori’s eyes. Pinpointing the exact location of her eyes, in addition to possessing a good amount of power, and on top of that, being harmless to Kaori. This was truly a feat only possible for Yue who deserved nothing less than the title of genius.

“Yue-san and Kaori-san, somehow, they seem to get along well.”

“Well, I get the feeling Yue likes teasing Kaori but…. yeah they seem rather playful don’t they?”

“Isn’t this more or less a form of friendship? Always quarrelling and so on…..”

(TN: For better or worse, this is where Tingle’s translation ends, and my/Southbounds begins)

Hajime smiled at the sight of the childish fight between Yue and Kaori. It was different from the relationship Yue and Shia shared. Hajime was extremely pleased that Yue exhibited such a happy mood.

When they play, rather than acting the part of an older sister as she would with Shia, she talked to Kaori more like a friend. The gap in childish behavior from Yue caused Hajime to hold back more than usual, and if asked, he would say things were fine because of Yue.

Ryuutaro’s darkest moment was turned into a punishment game for his childhood friend by none other than the woman he fell in love with at first sight…

“… It’s become enough punishment.”

“It is terrible…”

“Ryuutaro… I’m sorry, I am powerless.”

To the nearly unconscious Ryuutaro, Kouki gave a sympathetic expression… even thought he was still averting his gaze.

Five minutes later, after he had regained his consciousness and clothing, Ryuutaro gave an apology for acting rashly, which received lukewarm glances.

While Ryuutaro was trying to figure out what happened, Kouki tried to subtly deceive him with some polite fiction. However, because Hajime smirked and laughed at him, he had dark clouds hanging from his back, unlike his usual cheerful self.

Kouki desperately tried to calm Ryuutaro down while glancing back at Hajime and the rest as they started descending the staircase.

“Yue, just to be sure, is there any way we can fly over and skip this maze?”

“… Difficult, because I am not skilled enough yet, the mana consumption would be too high to continue with.”

“Oh well, figure as much. Looks like we need to take the maze head on.”

Hajime pulled out Shlagen (Tn: again, his rifle), and aimed it at the edge of ice wall. After hearing the shot, everyone looked at the wall in surprise.

The ice wall wasn’t too thick to be broken with Schlagen or Orkan.

However, as Hajime had expected, after the red spark pierced the wall, the surrounding ice around the hole restored it in no time. The restoration speed was even faster than the monsters from before.

“… Looks like it’s impossible to just break down the wall to quickly reach the goal after all.” Hajime muttered.

While watching for any counter attacks from the maze, he took out his compass with one hand. While the others looked at him in amazement, especially after what just happened to Ryuutaro, he ignored them.

“Next, let’s see if this guy works properly in the maze…”

Although everyone tensed when Hajime walked through the archway entrance to the maze… Hajime just watched the compass in his hand without any particular worry.

Right at the entrance was a reversed T-Junction that led to the right and left. The compass needle shown slightly, pointing them to the right passage.

“Fumu, looks like it doesn’t have any problem in the maze?”

“Ah. The maze won’t be a maze, thanks to this.”

Hajime smiled wryly at Tio’s affirmation as she followed him and passed through the arch. He was thinking he wished he had it during the Raisen Great Labyrinth.

“Uu, Meredi would have been no problem with this.”

“… Nn. Maybe that’s why they entrusted it to Haltina.”

While Shia responded with a sulk and ducked through the entrance, Yue and she reached the same conclusion as Hajime, that the compass was likely left in the Sea of Trees for that very reason.

Hajime patted each of them on the shoulder lightly, offering comfort. The three of them looked at each other with bitter smiles.

With an expression of disappointment at not being able to share those memories, Kaori and Tio shared a glance. After a background glance, the group moved onward.

With a width and length of ten kilometers, how long would such a maze take to clear normally? You would have to search in the cold that made you want to cry. It’d take incredible willpower.

“There’s… quite a sense of oppression.”

“Yeah. Because everyone’s appearance reflects from the walls, like a mirror house.”

Suzu was looking uneasily at the ten meter high Shizuku who was reflected on the icy walls.

“Because they came out of the walls earlier… is that the idea?”

“Likely. It’s a huge maze where you wonder around aimlessly. If or when a monster appears might be quite deadly.”

“… Nn, but there’s no problem.”

“That’s right, because we have Hajime’s Magic Eye and its perception abilities. Also, my rabbit ears won’t miss the sound of a surprise attack either.”

Shia was especially bright and confident. It was emphasized loudly when she struck the melons on her chest with a “ton” noise. Shizuku and Suzu’s morale took a hit, however Kouki and Ryuutaro were boosted after a quick glance as proof.

Of course, Hajime was giving them a glare. After becoming aware and admitting his feelings for Shia, he reacted to such gestures towards Shia.

“… Hajime?”

“*Cough* Ummm… The next turn is left, right?”

Giving a gentle look, Kaori tried to change the subject with a cough. Hajime looked at the compass awkwardly.

After seeing Hajime’s reaction, Shia covered her chest with her arms while her cheeks blushed her body wiggled.

“Really Hajime, what are you saying? You want to play with my chest again? Please pardon me that teasing smile… Well, that’s not to say it wasn’t amazing, and I’d love to do it again. But right now is no good! If you do it now, I will faint again and we won’t be able to finish the walk through-”

To Shia's confession, everyone turned their face to Hajime with an expression that said "what on earth did you do." mixed with shivering, shame, and envy. Hajime pretended not to notice and used his right to remain silent.

"… Hajime… What was done to Shia during her first time?… Hajime wild beast?"

"If I'm a wild beast, Yue is a beast trainer. Although I endure and counterattack."

While listening to Yue and Hajime's conversation and thinking "it's THAT, isn't it?", it could be said their experience was piling up, and the stairs to adulthood was climbed considerably.

Everyone was behaving suspiciously, at a loss on whether they should be listening to this conversation or not, when Hajime suddenly halted.

And, slipping out Donner high speed without looking back, he shot.

Dopan!!

The released bullet pass overhead of the blushing and panicking Suzu and crushed the arm with claws that was growing soundlessly from the wall.

"…!?"

Thanks to her small height, only a few hairs were lost. She lost her voice as the red flash passed by, experiencing the full power that was released from it.

"Coming, right and left wall."

Hajim reported a warning while ignoring the strangled noises coming from Suzu. His appearance was someone already switched completely to battle mode.

From the surrounding walls, fingers with claws, bones, and sinew, an ice statue like an armored Bullet beetle appeared.

"GuoOOO!" X5

From the right and left, Frost ogres attacked. Kouki intercepted the right side while Hajime took the left.

Shizuku and Kouki's killer attacks cut a Frost Ogre in two. Ryuutaro's fist attack crushed one at the chest, and the two remaining are forced at bay by Suzu's magical barrier.

This time, the demon stone that produced them infinitely did not appear in another place. A dark red crystal appeared inside the cut and the crushed chests. Kouki shot a blow at it.

The remainder were held in place by Suzu and Shizuku damaging them.

Meanwhile, Kouki and Ryuutaro delivered the finishing blows on the Frost ogres that they were dealing with. It was a one sided fight.

Forgetting caution, Kouki and Ryuutaro smiled at each other, and then they heard the shout of a lovely voice…

"UryaaA!"

Kouki, who turned around with a sudden look, saw the beautiful legs of Shia in an upward kick as she knocked five Frost ogres above them.

Though they struggled desperately, the Frost ogres didn't have the ability to fly, and crashed to the ground naturally thanks to gravity.

Shia, as she came back down, rotated elegantly and swung Doryuken with centrifugal force, hitting the frost ogre who had fallen down with perfect timing to be blown into a wall and shattered into pieces like a bomb exploding.

Shia didn't stop rotating, repeating the action with the other ogres. It appeared more like playing than actual combat.

Each Frost ogre crashed into the wall at the same exact place, causing the wall to take considerable damage.

"Suzu will be nice to rabbits when we get home. It is not wise to anger them, we should be nice…"

"Suzu… I completely understand your feelings."

While trembling at the sight, Suzu muttered these statements. When they return home, she didn't want to hold the rabbits of Earth in fear.

"They're not that strong. The surprise attack from anyone… well, it's okay if we take note."

Yue nodded slightly at what Hajime said, and Shizuku and her party were half smiling, because they were an enemy they wouldn't have a problem with if they were cooperating.

Afterwards, they encountered various traps. Ice spikes came from the walls; ice walls collapsed. Demons appeared from the walls for the next twelve hours as they explored the labyrinth maze.

While it wasn't extremely challenging, the continuous and monotonus scenery caused Kouki and the rest's attention to wander.

"Really, though we've walked and walked, Nagumo, how much further?"

Shizuku asked with a voice laced in exhaustion to Hajime's party, who seemed to be alright.

"Hmm? Because we're in a maze, the straight line distance won't be accurate. We seem to be about two kilometers from the entrance."

"Is that so?"

"Oh dear… let's take a rest a little if there is a suitable place."

"Fufu… thank you."

While looking at the state of Shizuku's companions, Hajime said while shrugging his shoulders. This caused her to smile broadly and got psyched up without noticing. However, Hajime's harem and Ryu noticed.

A while later they encountered a large double door, of which the compass indicated they needed to pass through.

“This is a spectacular door, too.”

“… Nn, Pretty.”

Looking up at the huge doors, they could see it wasn’t just made of ice. It was carved with flowers, thorns and roses, with a large round hole that took up about the fourth of the door within the design.

Hajime, for the time being, tried using the full power of his body against the door; however, as he had suspected, the large double doors did not budge at all.

“As I thought, the door won’t open until we find whatever goes into that cavity. Really, how troublesome.”

Hajime frowned, and the other members showed unpleasant expressions. It had already been more than fifteen hours since they had entered, and Kouki’s group were showing faces that were quickly growing tired.

“… Hajime. For now…”

“That’s right. For now, let’s set up to rest.”

Kouki’s group gave out a relieved expression and let out sighs at Hajime’s word. Obviously, their mental exhaustion had gathered considerably.

“You, stop going near the walls. It’s likely they’ll make a surprise attack, so come to the center if you’re going to take a rest.”

With that, Hajime stopped fifty meters away, took out a large tent from his Treasure Warehouse. While it wouldn’t stop a surprise attack, it would provide shelter.

With surprise, Kouki and party entered into the tent that had appeared suddenly before their eyes, seeing a space of about ten tatami mats inside.

“… This is a kotatsu (Tn: heated table)”

“Waa… a soft and warm carpet…”

“Neither snow nor wind enter here. Is this a magical barrier…? It’s a good temperature in this room.”

“No, it’s seriously comfortable! As expected of Nagumo.”

Shizuku said with an amazed expression leveled at Hajime. The girls were already warming themselves in the kotatsu while Suzu crawled onto the fluffy carpet on all fours.

For the moment, it was impossible to remove their shoes within the large labyrinth. However, there’s no problem keeping it clean. A fragment of crystal attached to the carpet was imbued with regeneration magic. It automatically cleaned any dirt or detritus that touched the carpet. (Tn: Only the Japanese would be concerned about their shoes dirtying a tent floor on a camping trip :P)

Exactly, a space of healing.

The group warmed themselves enthusiastically in the kotatsu with drowsy faces, except Suzu, who was already asleep lying face down. Thanks to the artifact for protection against the cold, they didn't feel it so much, but after being surrounded by ice, everyone was happy to be in a warm space.

As such, while being surrounded by each side by Yue and Shia, Hajime took out some Cross bits.

While the group looked with popped eyes, they disappeared outside to create a ring around the tent in the passage.

"We shouldn't be bothered with those four patrolling outside. The cross bits will give us a chance to relax."

"… What's that?"

"As long as you have the credentials, they should have no problems."

"But do they know what they're guarding?"

"The cross bits have been set to guard around the gate."

To Shizuku's questioning face, and Kouki's scornful eyes, Hajime answered while inclining his head a little. Yue was at his side, placing a hand on his face.

"… Not tired?"

"This tent has a recovery function." (TN: Is that how he made Shia lose consciousness? Giggity)

Hajime smiled while Yue's hand softly stroked his face gently while fluttering heart marks drifted between the two of them.

And, at that time, two rabbit ears touched Hajime's neck, drawing his attention to Shia. Shia drew her cheek near Hajime's shoulder with moistened upturned eyes that said "care for me too?".

Hajime drew an arm around Shia's waist and drew her close firmly. Doubling the heart marks going out. A pink space poured out, and you could almost swear the room temperature was increasing somehow.

While watching Tio and Kaori, who were slowly approaching them, Suzu muttered while on her own.

"… It seems that this space doesn't heal a lonely heart."

Kouki and the others agreed whole heartily.